

WRITTEN BY
Kumanano

ILLUSTRATED BY
029

11.5
novel

**KUMA
KUMA
KUMA
BEAR**



Table of Contents

[Table of Contents Page](#)

[Color Gallery](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyrights and Credits](#)

[Yuna's Status](#)

[Characters](#)

[STORIES FROM VOLUME 1](#)

[Chapter 1: Encounter with the Bear – Helen’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 2: Encounter with the Bear – Rulina’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 3: Encounter with the Bear – Elena’s Chronicles](#)

[STORIES FROM VOLUME 2](#)

[Chapter 4: Encounter with the Bear – Cliff ’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 5: Encounter with the Bear – Noa’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 6: Encounter with the Bear – Tiermina’s Chronicles](#)

[STORIES FROM VOLUME 3](#)

[Chapter 7: Noa Looks Forward to Going Out with the Bears](#)

[Chapter 8: Encounter with the Bear – Ellelaura’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 9: Encounter with the Bear – Shia’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 10: A Trip to the Castle with the Bear – Fina’s Chronicles](#)

[STORIES FROM VOLUME 4](#)

[Chapter 11: Karin Working in the Crimonia Shop](#)

[Chapter 12: Working for the Bear – Tiermina’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 13: The Bear Tests a New Skill](#)

[Chapter 14: Worrying About the Bear – Deigha’s Chronicles](#)

STORIES FROM VOLUME 5

Chapter 15: Cliff Goes to the Capital

Chapter 16: Yuna and the Bears and the Bears

Chapter 17: Ange and Princess Flora

Chapter 18: Fina's Trip to Mileela

STORIES FROM VOLUME 6

Chapter 19: Mileela's Damon

Chapter 20: Reporting to the Academy – Maricks' Chronicles

Chapter 21: Anz Departs for Crimonia

Chapter 22: Noa, Fina, and the Bear Bread

STORIES FROM VOLUME 7

Chapter 23: Fina and Shia Stay Up Late

Chapter 24: Encounter with the Bear – Ghazal's Chronicles

Chapter 25: The Bear Investigates Tiermina

Chapter 26: Noa Works at the Shop

STORIES FROM VOLUME 8

Chapter 27: Encounter with the Bear – The Queen's Chronicles

Chapter 28: Ogul of the Cheese Village

Chapter 29: Choosing Fina's Dress

Chapter 30: Sherry Makes Stuffed Animals

STORIES FROM VOLUME 9

Chapter 31: The Bear Fan Club's Tea Party – Fina's Chronicles

Chapter 32: Ange and the Bear Stuffed Animals

Chapter 33: Retbelle Searches for the Picture Book

Chapter 34: Miranda and Luimin's Encounter

Chapter 35: Encounter with the Bear – The Gate Guard's Chronicles

[Chapter 36: Bear Cupid – Gentz’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 37: Encounter with the Bear – Orphan Girl’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 38: Headed to the Capital – Fina’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 39: Headed to the Capital – Cliff ’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 40: Encounter with the Bear – Cheese Village Chief ’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 41: Encounter with the Bear – Karin’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 42: Encounter with the Bear – Sanya’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 43: Encounter with the Bear – Milaine’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 44: My Big Sister’s Job – Shuri’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 45: Encounter with the Bear – Atola’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 46: Mileela’s Tunnel – Cliff ’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 47: Encounter with the Bear – Misa’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 48: The Birthday Invitation, Part One – Misa’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 49: The Birthday Invitation, Part Two – Misa’s Chronicles](#)

[Chapter 50: Intensive Training with the Bear – Horn’s Chronicles](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Newsletter](#)



STORIES FROM VOLUME 1

- 1 Encounter with the Bear – Helen’s Chronicles
- 2 Encounter with the Bear – Rulina’s Chronicles
- 3 Encounter with the Bear – Elena’s Chronicles.....

STORIES FROM VOLUME 2

- 4 Encounter with the Bear – Cliff’s Chronicles
- 5 Encounter with the Bear – Noa’s Chronicles.....
- 6 Encounter with the Bear – Tiermina’s Chronicles

STORIES FROM VOLUME 3

- 7 Noa Looks Forward to Going Out with the Bears
- 8 Encounter with the Bear – Ellelaura’s Chronicles.....
- 9 Encounter with the Bear – Shia’s Chronicles.....
- 10 A Trip to the Castle with the Bear – Fina’s Chronicles.....

CONTENTS

STORIES FROM VOLUME 4

- 11 Karin Working in the Crimonia Shop.....
- 12 Working for the Bear – Tiermina’s Chronicles.....
- 13 The Bear Tests a New Skill.....
- 14 Worrying About the Bear – Deigha’s Chronicles

STORIES FROM VOLUME 5

- 15 Cliff Goes to the Capital.....
- 16 Yuna and the Bears and the Bears
- 17 Ange and Princess Flora
- 18 Fina’s Trip to Mileela

STORIES FROM VOLUME 6

- 19 Mileela’s Damon.....
- 20 Reporting to the Academy – Maricks’ Chronicles
- 21 Anz Departs for Crimonia.....
- 22 Noa, Fina, and the Bear Bread

STORIES FROM VOLUME 7

- 23 Fina and Shia Stay Up Late

- 24 Encounter with the Bear – Ghazal’s Chronicles
- 25 The Bear Investigates Tiermina.....
- 26 Noa Works at the Shop.....

STORIES FROM VOLUME 8

- 27 Encounter with the Bear – The Queen’s Chronicles
- 28 Ognl of the Cheese Village.....
- 29 Choosing Fina’s Dress
- 30 Sherry Makes Stuffed Animals.....

STORIES FROM VOLUME 9

- 31 The Bear Fan Club’s Tea Party – Fina’s Chronicles
- 32 Ange and the Bear Stuffed Animals.....
- 33 Retbelle Searches for the Picture Book
- 34 Miranda and Luimin’s Encounter



- 35 Encounter with the Bear – The Gate Guard’s Chronicles
- 36 Bear Cupid – Gentz’s Chronicles.....
- 37 Encounter with the Bear – Orphan Girl’s Chronicles
- 38 Headed to the Capital – Fina’s Chronicles.....
- 39 Headed to the Capital – Cliff’s Chronicles
- 40 Encounter with the Bear – Cheese Village Chief’s Chronicles.....
- 41 Encounter with the Bear – Karin’s Chronicles.....
- 42 Encounter with the Bear – Sanya’s Chronicles
- 43 Encounter with the Bear – Milaine’s Chronicles
- 44 My Big Sister’s Job – Shuri’s Chronicles.....
- 45 Encounter with the Bear – Atola’s Chronicles
- 46 Mileela’s Tunnel – Cliff’s Chronicles
- 47 Encounter with the Bear – Misa’s Chronicles.....
- 48 The Birthday Invitation, Part One – Misa’s Chronicles.....
- 49 The Birthday Invitation, Part Two – Misa’s Chronicles
- 50 Intensive Training with the Bear – Horn’s Chronicles
- Afterword.....







VOL.3 COVER





VOL.6 COVER





VOL.7 COVER

VOL.8 COVER





VOL.9 COVER



CHARACTER REFERENCE

Yuna

Nickname: The Bloody Bear
15 Y.O. About 150 cm (or maybe 151 cm?)
Long, straight black hair; flat-chested

Based on how the light hits it, the black in her hair changes can look green—just a little detail with the color.

If I had to compare it to a real color, it's best described as slate green.

Making her hair jet-black didn't make much of a splash, so I've leaned toward the green since this is fiction (ha ha ha).

Can be even more white for color pages.

A critical point is that the hair flips up!

Normal (Black) Bear Version

- The clothes are reversible, so the inside is white.
- The hood's default expression is , but it can also be  or 

Uses different ones based on the scene! (It changes based on how action-oriented the scene is.)

Recovery and bedtime (white) bear version

The inside lining inside is black.

Her hair is usually tucked inside her clothes.



- Her clothes don't have a zipper. If she loosens the ribbon at her neck, the onesie falls right off.

Left hand puppet version

Right hand puppet version



My imagined impression of Yuna. I think her expressions don't change much (other than on special occasions) but is that really the case?

Bears on the back (black and white)

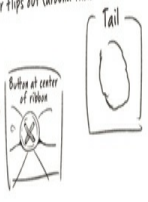


★ Characteristics
White (with a very light pink tint)
Droopy eyes
Fur flips out (around face)



Kumakyu

About 140-150 cm tall



Normal bear paws have five toes, but this one has three to match the bear suit. I would like direction on whether to use real bears as a reference.

Claws are white

Kumakyu

Black (Pinky eyes)
Fur goes this way



Gentz

In his thirties; dark hair
Used to be an adventurer, so he's buff



Has tools he uses at his hip. Some are used when buying materials from adventurers; others are used while taking notes



Magnifying glass around his neck



Tiermina

Finia's mother, and a widow.
Was bedridden from sickness.

Wears a long, shoulder-strap dress under her cardigan with a white camisole under that. Has a thin ribbon loosely tied at her waist.

- Slightly messy hair (with some flyaways)
- Thin
- Not very well-endowed

Slippers

Fina

10 Y.O.; shorter than Yuna
Dark brown, almost black hair; flat chested

Wears a very large ribbon barrette
at the center-back of her head



Snaps closed



★ Top is a cold shoulder
style dress



★ Vest



★ Wears a choker around her neck
(same color as her clothes)



Two ribbons

★ Flared skirt
(white lace inside)

★ Tights
(about 70 denier)

Magnifi-
cation



Has a pattern on
each side, but can
be omitted in some
situations



• Generally has curly
hair that goes to the
nape of her neck and
her shoulder

• Face looks kind



✂ Second cover reference



Shuri

Fina's little sister (7 Y.O.)
Very energetic girl
About 110-117 cm tall

Slightly
curled hair
Pigtails



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Seven Seas Entertainment

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Name: Yuna
Age: 15
Gender: Female

► Yuna's Status_

► **BEAR HOOD (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Can see the effects of weapons and tools through the beary good eyes of the hood.

► **BLACK BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Attack glove, increases power based on the user's level. Can summon the black bear Kumayuru.

► **WHITE BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Defense glove, increases defense based on the user's level. Can summon the white bear Kumakyu.

► **BLACK AND WHITE BEAR CLOTHES (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Appears to be a onesie. Reversible.
Front: Black Bear Clothes
Increases physical and magic resistance based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.
Reverse: White Bear Clothes
Automatically restores health and mana while worn.
Restoration amount and speed is based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.

► **BLACK BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
► **WHITE BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Increases speed based on the user's level.
Prevents fatigue walking long distances based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.

► **BEAR UNDERWEAR (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Won't get dirty no matter how much they're used.
An excellent item that won't retain sweat or smells.
Will grow with the user.

◀ **KUMAYURU (CUB FORM)**

▼ **KUMAKYU**





► **BEAR SUMMONS**
Can be summoned from the bear gloves.
Can be changed into cub forms.

Skills

► FANTASY WORLD LANGUAGE

The fantasy world's language will sound like Japanese. Spoken words are conveyed to the other party in the fantasy world language.

► FANTASY WORLD LITERACY

The ability to read the fantasy world writing. Written words become the fantasy world's words.

► BEAR EXTRADIMENSIONAL STORAGE

The white bear's mouth opens into infinite space. It can hold (eat) anything.

However, it cannot hold (eat) living things.

Time will stop for objects that are inside of it.

Anything that is put into the extradimensional storage can be pulled out at any time.

► BEAR IDENTIFICATION

By looking through the bear eyes on the Bear Clothes' hood, one can see the effects of a weapon or tool.

Doesn't work without wearing the hood.

► BEAR DETECTION

Using the wild abilities of bears, can detect monsters or people.

► BEAR MAP 2.0

Any area looked at by the bear eyes can be made into a map.

► BEAR SUMMONING

Bears can be summoned from the bear gloves.

A black bear can be summoned from the black glove.

A white bear can be summoned from the white glove.

Summons, Beast Cubification: The bear summons can be transformed into bear cubs.

► BEAR TRANSPORTER GATE

By setting up a gate, can move between gates.

When more than three gates are in place, can travel to a location by picturing it.

This gate can only be opened with the bear hand.

► BEAR PHONE

Can have long-distance conversations with others.

Phone persists until caster dispels it. Physically indestructible.

Can call people a bear phone is given to by picturing the person.

Incoming call is announced by the sound of a bear's cry.

By using mana to turn the phone on or off, user can make calls.

► BEAR WATER WALKING

Gain the ability to traverse water.

Summons gain the ability to travel on water.

► BEAR TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION

You can call your summoned beasts from a distance.

Magic

► BEAR LIGHT

Mana collected in the bear glove creates a light in the shape of a bear.

► BEAR PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENT

Routing mana through the bear gear allows for physical enhancement.

► BEAR FIRE MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use fire elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more..

► BEAR WATER MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use water elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WIND MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use wind elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR EARTH MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use earth elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR ELECTRICITY MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use electricity elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more..

► BEAR HEALING MAGIC

Can give treatment by means of the bear's kind heart.



CRIMONIA



FINA

A ten-year-old girl. The first person Yuna met when she came to the other world. Yuna saved her mother. She harvests the monsters Yuna defeats. Yuna brings her around whenever she goes anywhere.



MILAINE

Merchant Guild master in Crimonia. Provides support to Yuna. Though she loses her self-control when it comes to delicious pudding, she's actually a very capable woman.

GENTZ

In charge of harvesting monsters at the Crimonia adventurers' guild. Cares for Fina and later marries Tiermina.

RALOCK

Crimonia's adventurers' guild master. Yuna knows him as the muscle man and refuses to learn his given name.

ELENA

Innkeeper's daughter in Crimonia. Jealous that Yuna can use magic.

GOLD

Crimonia's blacksmith. Eventually makes Fina her mithril knife.

NELT

Gold's wife. The reliable one who supports him because he can only blacksmith.

BRANDAUGH

Hunter in a village near Crimonia. Yuna takes care of a forest guardian that keeps attacking the village, so he's grateful to her.

MARIE

Brandaugh's wife. Was pregnant when Yuna met her. Gives birth to Yuuk.



HELEN

Receptionist at the Crimonia adventurers' guild. Registered Yuna at the guild. Is always surprised by what new monsters Yuna has dealt with.

DEBORANAY

D-rank adventurer who picked a fight with Yuna at the guild and was promptly beaten to a pulp.

LANZ

Adventurer who admires Deboranay. Breaks away from his old party members Rulina and Gil.

RULINA

Female adventurer from the same party as Lanz. Becomes a guard for Yuna's shop and has a deepening friendship with Yuna.

GIL

An adventurer of few words from Lanz's party. Later leaves Lanz and starts working with Rulina more often.

JADE

Leader of a four-person adventurer party that Yuna meets in the Crimonia guild.

MEL

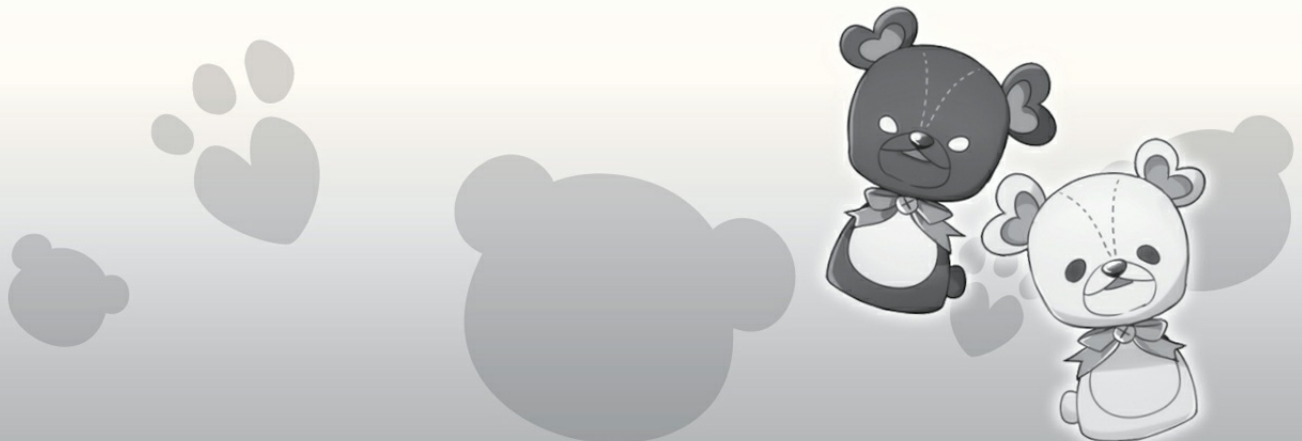
A female adventurer in Jade's party. Later reunites with Yuna during the student escort quest and golem-slaying mission.

TOYA

A rather glib swordsman in Jade's party. Later meets Yuna again while golem slaying.

SENIA

Part of Jade's party and a woman of few words. Wears light clothes.



VOL. 2



SHURI

Fina's little sister. Seven years old. Sticks by her mother Tiermina and is a very well-behaved girl who helps out at the Bear's Lounge. Loves bears.



TIERMINA

Fina and Shuri's mother. Rescued from her illness by Yuna. Afterward, she marries Gentz. Yuna has left her in charge of the Bear's Lounge, among many other things.

LALA

The Fochrosé family's maid. A master teamaker who shows Yuna the ropes of the art of brewing.

RONDO

The Fochrosé family's butler. Cliff's right-hand man and adviser.

ENZ ROLAND

A man who used to pocket the orphanage's funds for himself. His misdeeds are exposed and he is subsequently executed.

BO

The orphanage's headmistress. While the orphanage is in danger of losing funding, she strains to take care of the orphans herself.

LIZ

A teacher at the orphanage. Takes good care of the orphans alongside the headmistress.

ROY

Tiermina's late husband. Was part of a three-person party with Gentz and Tiermina.



NOIR FOCHROSÉ

Nicknamed Noa. Ten years old. Second daughter of the Fochrosé family. An energetic girl who absolutely adores bears. Becomes friends with Fina through Yuna.



CLIFF FOCHROSÉ

Noa's father and the Lord of Crimonia. A man well-acquainted with Yuna's hijinks. Although friendly with Yuna, he speaks quite frankly with her.

HORN

A novice adventurer who came to Crimonia with her childhood friends. Yuna teaches her magic.

SHIN

De-facto party leader of Horn's group. Gil teaches him sword skills.

LAHTE

A new adventurer and Horn's friend. Archer. Brandaugh, the hunter, teaches him how to shoot arrows.

BRUTE

The big guy of Horn's party. Axe-wielder.

KAI

A boy from a village plagued by a vicious black viper. Comes to Crimonia to seek help from adventurers.

YUUK

A child of Brandaugh, the hunter, and Marie, who live in a village near Crimonia. Newborn infant.



VOL. 3



ELLELAURA FOCHROSÉ

Noa and Shia's mother. Thirty-five years old. Usually working for the king and seems oddly well-known. Helps Yuna out with all sorts of things.



SHIA FOCHROSÉ

Noa's older sister. Fifteen years old. A little headstrong. Wears her hair in pig tails. Goes to the capital's academy. Yuna meets her while escorting Noa to the capital.



MISANA FAHRENGRAM

Also known as Misa. On the way to the king's birthday festival, Yuna saves her from a monster attack. Invites Yuna to her tenth birthday party.



SANYA

The master of the adventurers' guild in the capital. An elf. Helps Yuna with some troublesome adventurers. Has a little sister named Luimin.

GRAN FAHRENGRAM

Misa's grandfather and the Lord of Sheelin. Yuna saves him from monsters on the way to the capital

MORIN

A capital baker. Yuna helps her out when her bakery is in trouble. After that, she's put in charge of the Bear's Lounge.

KARIN

Morin's daughter. Works at the Bear's Lounge along with her mother. Just about as good at her mom at baking.

SURILINA

The Fochrosé family's maid in the capital. Her hobby is tending to the garden.

ZAMOL

A villager who sold potatoes in the capital. Very happy to learn Yuna's potato-based dishes are a big hit.



PRINCESS FLORA

Princess of the Elfanica Kingdom. Calls Yuna "bear." Yuna likes her, frequently showering her with gifts like picture books and stuffed animals.



KING FOROT

King of the Elfanica Kingdom. Yuna saves him from a plot to overthrow the monarchy. A rather candid king who goes to Yuna's house to order pudding from her and the like.



QUEEN KITEIA

Princess Flora's mother and Elfanica's queen. Likes Kumakyu and Kumayuru just as much as Princess Flora does. Yuna gives her stuffed animals too.

MARINA

An adventurer who protected Gran. Reunites with Yuna in Sheelin. Exterminates big moles with Yuna.

ELLE

A well-endowed mage from Marina's party. Yuna has forgotten her name by the time they reunite in Sheelin.

ITIA

An adventurer from Marina's party. Wields a large sword. Powerful enough to defeat two orcs on their own.

MASRIKA

Part of Marina's party. A swordswoman. Was doing another job in Sheelin with Itia and was not around

RANZEL

Guard captain in the capital. Accompanies ElleLaura in Sheelin when there is a dispute.

GHOULZAM

Resents the kingdom for exiling him and tries to send monsters to the capital. Yuna foils his plans and he dies in vain.

ZANG

Elfanica's chancellor. Yuna's visits cause him problems because the king saddles him with extra work.

VOL. 4



ANZ

Innkeeper's daughter from Mileela. Yuna invites her to Crimonia because of her cooking skills. Leaves her father and takes charge of the Bear's Dining Room in Crimonia.



MIL

A twelve-year-old orphan girl. Leader of the orphans working at the Bear's Lounge. An energetic worker who wears a bear jacket at her job.

DEIGHA

Innkeeper at Mileela and Anz's father. Yuna is impressed by his skills with cooking seafood.

JEREMO

Mileela Merchant Guild employee. When peace comes to Mileela, he becomes the guild master because of his likability.

DAMON

A Mileelan fisherman Yuna saves on the way to seeing the ocean.



ATOLA

Master of the Mileela adventurers' guild. A little apathetic in some ways but starts working hard again after Yuna returns peace to the town.

YUULA

Damon's wife. A strong woman who knows how to manage her husband.

OLD MAN KURO

One of the elders of Mileela. Asks Yuna to mediate between Cliff and the town.

BLITZ

A C-rank adventurer Yuna meets in Mileela. Visits Yuna's shop in Crimonia.

ROSA, RAN, AND GLIMOS

Blitz's party members/harem.

SEI

Adventurers' guild employee in Mileela. Basically an assistant to Atola.

VOL. 5

ANGE

Caretaker to Princess Flora. Has a daughter the same age as the princess.

LEM

Keeper of the bee tree. Has been saved by bears before and is therefore grateful when Yuna helps the bears of the bee tree.

LIANNA

Employee at Crimonia's merchant guild. Helps Yuna buy a storefront for Anz.

ANABELL

Employee at Crimonia's merchant guild who has been sent to Mileela's guild. Teaches Jeremo the ropes.



VOL. 6



SHERRY

An orphan girl. Apprenticing at a tailor because she's good with her hands. Accepts a commission from Yuna to create stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

MARICKS

An energetic member of Shia's practical training party, he has a strong sense of justice. Ends up acting as the decoy.

TIMOL

Another member of the practical training party. When Maricks says he will be a decoy, Timol acts chivalrously and stays behind with him.

SHOOG

An instructor from Shia's academy. Surprised when Yuna is recommended as a guard for the practical training, but trusts Ellelaura's judgement.

JIGULDO

Shia's classmate at the academy. When he tries to make fun of Yuna, Maricks and the others readily defend her.

GARAN

A villager where Shia and the others went for the practical training. When a valuable silkworm shed is attacked by a monster, he returns to the village to get help.

KABOSS

Head of the village where Shia's practical training happened; Garan's father.



CATTLEYA

Shia's classmate at the academy. A well-to-do young woman. During the practical training, she finds out that Yuna and Shia know each other. Rather perceptive.

GEWN AND GELD

The two villagers who were attacked by monsters and stranded for a time at the silkworm shed during Shia's practical training.

NEAF

Travels from Mileela to Crimonia to work at Anz's shop but ends up working at the orphanage instead.

SENO

The youngest of the group who came to work at Anz's shop. When she first meets Yuna, calls her "teddy."

FORNE

Comes to work at Anz's shop. Like an older sister to Anz and Seno.

BETTLE

Comes to work in Anz's shop. A hard-working girl.

GHAZAL

A blacksmith in the capital. At Gold's instruction, Yuna comes to see him. Later on, he makes mithril fighting knives for Yuna.



VOL. 7



ZELEF

Head chef at the royal palace. Yuna brings him from the capital to Sheelin for the Fahrengram family. Plans to open a store in the capital that serves Yuna's recipes.

RED BOZO RANGER

His real name is Barbould. Leader of the bozo rangers. A C-rank adventurer with red hair and red armor.

BLUE BOZO RANGER

Member of the bozo rangers. An adventurer with blue equipment and armor.

GREEN BOZO RANGER

Member of the bozo rangers. An adventurer with green equipment and armor.

BLACK BOZO RANGER

Member of the bozo rangers. An adventurer with a black mantle.

WHITE BOZO RANGER

Member of the bozo rangers. An adventurer with a white mantle.

NERIN

Morin's relative. Runs into Yuna when she comes to the capital to see Morin. Later on, she takes over cake production in Morin's shop.

VOL. 8

GAJURDO SALBARD

Joint feudal lord of Sheelin. Almost brings down Gran before his evil deeds are exposed. He is executed for his crimes.

RANDLE SALBARD

Gajurdo's thickheaded son. Fights with Misa. Later on, he has Misa kidnapped, gets punished by Yuna, and is put on house arrest with his relatives.

BRAD

An adventurer in cahoots with Gajurdo. Responsible for injuring Botts. Later on, snatches Misa. This, of course, gets him beaten to a pulp by Yuna.

BOTTS

The Fahrengram family's chef. Falls into Gajurdo's trap and gets his arm injured. An associate of Zelef.

LEONARDO

Gran's son and Misa's father. A bit timid. After Gran's retirement, takes over as feudal lord.

MEISHUN

A maid at Gran's estate. Can tell from Misa's expressions if she's in trouble.

ERNAT

Son of King Forot. Every time Yuna comes to visit the castle, he's forced to take over the king's work.

MOLOOG

The head chef of the restaurant where Zelef and Botts used to work together. After his retirement, Bolsack takes over.

BOLSACK

The head chef that took over from Moloog. A heartless man who blacklists Botts.

GOUGES

A guard for Cliff on his way to Gran's birthday celebration. The bear house takes him by surprise, but he is thankful for the shelter.

RABON

One of Cliff's travel guards. Cleans the baths in the bear house as a thank you for the accommodations.

TEMOKA

Tailor in Crimonia. Takes the orphan Sherry in as an apprentice.

NAR

Temoka's wife. Serves customers and assists at her husband's tailoring shop.

ROYMOND AND LOK

Castle gatekeepers. They were bewildered when they received the order to immediately inform the king anytime Yuna comes to the castle.

VOL. 9



LUIMIN

An elf girl who collapses in front of the capital bear house. Traveled to the capital to warn her older sister Sanya that the elves' village is in danger.

LUFA

A maid of the Salbard family, she reveals the misdeeds of her former employer. Afterward, she is placed under Gran's care.

MIRANDA

An adventurer who watched over Luimin in Laluz. Leader of a three-woman party.

ERIEL

A member of Miranda's party. Loves cute girls. Very enthusiastically tries to hug Yuna.

SHARLA

A member of Miranda's party and a mage. Stops Eriel from hugging Yuna.

DOGLUD

Requests that Luimin carry a painting to sell, but the young elf damages it. Takes her elvish bracelet as reimbursement.



ALKA

Granddaughter of the merchant Retbelle. Takes an interest in the bear picture book she sees at a friend's house. Yuna gives her a book. Alka gives Yuna a lovely smile in return.

RETBELLE

Purchaser of the painting that Luimin destroyed. Tries to obtain the elvish bracelet for his granddaughter.

SEFFLE

Alka's mother and Retbelle's daughter. Suggests that Retbelle give Yuna a house at the outskirts of the town.

RODIS

Retbelle's coachman. Takes Yuna and Retbelle to Retbelle's estate.

VOLZ AND MISHEL

Two royal guards ElleLaura brings with her from the capital. They arrest the Salbard family.

RUTTO

An employee at Doglude's shop. He minds the shop as Yuna and her group talk with Doglude.

OTHERS

MOLNAKA

A woman in her twenties who works in the castle. Princess Flora reads a picture book to her.

MORISSA

A woman who works in the castle. Looking for a copy of the bear picture book Princess Flora has.

OGUL

Son of the chief of the cheese village. Visits Crimonia to deliver cheese to Yuna.

MINSHA

A small girl at the orphanage. Begg Sherry for Kumayuru and Kumakyu stuffed animals.

LISHA

Ange's daughter. Smiles a lot when given Kumayuru and Kumakyu stuffed animals as presents.

SUMMONED BEAST FOLG

Sanya's summoned bird. Sanya can see anything the bird can see.





STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 1



BIRTH OF THE BEAR GIRL!

Yuna is a fifteen-year-old shut-in. One day, she logs into her online game as usual and receives a gift. She chooses one of the item treasure boxes and receives none other than a bear gear set from it. Though she's initially befuddled and incredibly embarrassed by the onesie, she still answers a survey and logs into her game...only to find herself in an unfamiliar forest. Stranger still, she's wearing the bear onesie set! As Yuna begins to panic, she receives a letter that appears to be from a god. The letter informs her that she's going to be living in another world from now on!

THIS IS ANOTHER WORLD?

Believing the message from the god is an in-game event, Yuna starts looking for other players. Once she starts slaying wolves and they don't transform into items, she gradually begins to believe the strange message she received. Before long, Yuna hears someone calling for help. Rushing toward the cry to their aid, she discovers a girl being attacked by wolves. Yuna uses her powerful new bear gear to save the girl—Fina—and asks for help getting to the nearby town of Crimonia.



THEY CALL HER THE BLOODY BEAR!

Yuna arrives in town and, upon seeing her reflection in the mirror, fully realizes that she truly is in another world. Yuna decides to make the best of the situation—she might as well enjoy the new world she's in, after all—and wastes no time registering at the adventurers' guild. But her bear-like appearance quickly sends the situation flying off the rails at the guild. The other adventurers pick a fight with Yuna, but she easily turns the tables on them and officially becomes an F-Rank adventurer. Once her registration is official, Yuna explores the town with the help of Fina, tries out some magic, swiftly slays a goblin king, and becomes a D-Rank adventurer in what feels like the blink of an eye! On top of that, she's been dubbed the "Bloody Bear" to boot...



HER SUMMONS AND BEAR HOUSE

In order to help Fina, who works in place of her bedridden mother, Yuna employs the girl to harvest the monsters she slays. As part of that, she takes Fina along with her to defeat some tigerwolves. Yuna gives Fina quite the fright on the way there by summoning her beast summons, Kumayuru and Kumakyu, and by pulling a bear-shaped bear house out of her bear storage. Still, the tigerwolf slaying goes off without a hitch. Once they return to town, Yuna whips up a bear house in no time (literally), which gives Fina a place to do her harvesting work.

Story:

Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear 1

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Chapter 1:

Encounter with the Bear

Helen's Chronicles

AS ALWAYS, THE GUILD was chock-full of adventurers. Today, I was dealing with some grungy male adventurers at the reception desk...yet again. There were female adventurers too, but the number of guys present was a little overwhelming.

As I sat at the reception desk, an adventurer made his way over with a quest sheet. I asked him to present his guild card, checked the quest sheet, and operated the crystal panel.

"Here you go. Please work hard out there!"

I sent the adventurer off with a smile—a good encouraging smile is essential for any guild receptionist. After all, danger goes hand in hand with an adventurer's work. I'd seen my fair share of adventurers who had swaggered out, never to return.

"I see," I said. "So, you've chosen this quest?"

I processed the new quest sheet and sent the adventurer on his way. My duties were second nature at this point. Sure, we had fewer adventurers in the guild these days, but there were always enough to make time fly quick enough.

It was about then that the girl in the strange outfit walked in. She must've been around twelve or thirteen: and she was dressed as a bear.

How adorable!!! I'd never seen clothes like hers before, but they were just downright delightful—just perfect for such a cute girl. I'd never be able to pull that look off.

The girl made her way over to me, looking around the guild as she did.

"So...I'm new here," she said.

I supposed she meant it was her first time in the guild. Did she want to

register as an adventurer? Our minimum age requirement *was* just thirteen, but we rarely saw people come in on their own to join.

Just in case, I asked for clarification. “I see. So, you’d like to become a member of the guild?”

“Yeah. I heard that guild cards are a form of identification, right?”

So *that* was her aim then. Sensible enough. “Correct. You’ll also be able to use the guild member card in any country.”

“In that case, could you help me with it?”

As I walked her through the guild procedures, an adventurer approached the girl from behind. It was the D-Rank adventurer, Deboranay. Though he was *very* strong, he honestly wasn’t a very nice fellow.

“Hey,” said Deboranay, smiling nastily. “Is that gal in the weird clothes supposed to be an adventurer? Looks like she’s really underestimating us hardworking folk. Little ladies like you drive down our market value.”

Just as I was about to intervene, the girl turned around to face Deboranay. They started to get into an argument.

The girl had such confidence, but why? Deboranay looked so frightening that most people instinctively avoided him on sight.

The girl turned to me. “Ma’am, this guy’s talking a lot, but is he telling the truth?”

I explained the guild regulations to her: that the minimum age requirement was thirteen, and that an adventurer must obtain E-rank status within their first year. That involved demonstrating the ability to slay low-level monsters like goblins and wolves. If an adventurer couldn’t do that, they would be stripped of their guild card and status.

After I finished with my explanation, the girl replied with something truly outrageous:

“In that case, we’re good. I can easily beat a wolf.”

I was shocked. She could slay *wolves*? Failing to do just that—and failing to slay goblins, too—typically drove away most prospective adventurers.

“Gah ha ha! Don’t make stuff up, little lady. There’s no way some girl could beat a wolf.”

I had my own reservations, honestly.

“What’s this guy’s rank?” the girl asked me.

“This is Mr. Deboranay, a D-Rank adventurer.”

“And the ones laughing at me?”

“They are all D-rank and E-rank adventurers.”

“Hmph. This adventurers’ guild must be pretty lame if all these people are just D-rank.”

Just like that, the girl had said the unthinkable. Predictably, the adventurers in the room snapped.

There was no stopping this now.

*Oh, please, **please** don’t make Deboranay any angrier than he already is, I thought.*

As a general rule, the guild was supposed to remain neutral when it came to adventurers. But this girl was not yet an adventurer, and I really should’ve helped her. At the time, though, I was simply too petrified of Deboranay to say a single word.

“Is there a place around where we can have a match?” the girl asked. She wanted to *fight* Deboranay? Impossible! A little girl like her could never win against a nasty brute like him.

Though I tried to stop it, the two set up their match...and then the girl proposed something even more outrageous to Deboranay and his gang.

“If you guys win,” she said, “I’ll give up on becoming an adventurer and leave. If you guys lose, *you’ll* stop being adventurers and leave. That good with you?”

Deboranay accepted.

Why was she saying such things? She could have come back when Deboranay was gone and got her guild card then. Worse, I probably could’ve headed it all off if I’d intervened earlier.

But then, before my very eyes, the very thing I'd feared...didn't happen. In fact, it was the exact opposite. The situation was too quick to really follow, but one thing was certain: it had hardly been a fight at all. She was quick, and Deboranay hadn't been able to land a single blow.

"Ms. Front Desk Receptionist, I won the match just now." The girl pressed her knife against Deboranay's neck. "Didn't I?"

"You've got to be kidding me," Deboranay snarled. "The battle isn't over yet."

Despite the girl's clear victory, Deboranay glared in my direction. One look at that face and I couldn't speak. I couldn't say that the fight was over and Deboranay had lost.

So they started a new match.

The girl moved quickly, dodging Deboranay's attacks before closing in for an attack of her own. She punched him. She punched again. She punched and punched until his face was the approximate shape and shade of a lumpy grapefruit.

Deboranay fought back all the way through, but she just kept hitting until he stopped moving. In the end, he couldn't move a muscle.

With the fight over, the girl came over to me and asked me to deregister Deboranay and the adventurers with him, which...well, I couldn't do that, could I? But then again, Deboranay *had* agreed that he would leave the guild if he lost.

The adventurers around us got upset at the girl's request. One by one, they started to gang up on this poor little girl. This was getting dangerous—how had things come to this?

By the time I could think straight enough to try putting a stop to this situation, it was too late. The fight had begun. The adventurers surrounded the girl. Some of them were even smirking.

Then the girl made her move.

In an instant—*crack!*—one of them went soaring into the air. Another one

was sent tumbling across the ground. The next keeled over. The girl broke out from the circle and began to run. She swept around to the side of an adventurer so quickly that they could only watch as her bear onesie fists pummeled him head-on. With every punch, an adventurer flew several meters into the air—despite the heavy gear they wore—and tumbled back down to the ground.

I couldn't believe my eyes.

In the end, the girl was the last one standing.

Never in my life had I met such a strong (and so cute!) new adventurer, but there she was, standing right before me.

And that was how I met the adorable bear.

Chapter 2:

Encounter with the Bear

Rulina's Chronicles

I RECEIVED WORD from the adventurers' guild that Deboranay had been injured. It was supposed to be our day off today: we were resting up for a goblin-slaying quest we had tomorrow.

Our party comprised three vanguards and one rear guard. Deboranay was our center vanguard and a powerful adventurer, but he had some...personality flaws. Lanz was our left vanguard, and he idolized the guy he stood beside in combat. Gil, ever the silent one, covered our right. Being the mage, I was rear guard...and here we were now, with an injured center rounding out our group.

I rushed to the adventurers' guild to find Deboranay, unconscious. He'd been laid on a bed to rest, and you could see immediately just how swollen his face was.

"Who would do *this* to Deboranay?" Lanz asked the nearby guild master.

Apparently, it'd been a young rookie. From what I understood, Deboranay picked a fight with this new girl when she came to register with the guild. Picking fights with little girls, though? *Seriously*, Deboranay?

What's more, the girl had supposedly been dressed up as a bear, though I couldn't really picture it. From what the guild master said, she'd apparently been pretty cute, too. After accepting Deboranay's challenge to a duel, she had turned the tables on him. Then, she'd overpowered an entire *group* of other adventurers.

Just who was this girl...?

The next day our party members met up for a discussion. We came to the conclusion that without Deboranay, we couldn't safely complete the quest. Lanz kept going on and on about how cancelling the quest would leave a mark

on his record, but Gil and I were able to persuade him to at least come to hash things out.

As the three of us came to the adventurers' guild, Lanz started to run.

"Lanz?" I chased after him just as he began accosting a girl dressed as a bear.

"Was it you?" he asked. "You the girl who beat up Deboranay?!"

So it was really true: the girl in front of him was dressed as a bear. Deboranay had lost to this little girl? I knew Lanz was genuinely pretty upset about it all, but the thought that Deboranay had lost to her was hilarious.

While I was laughing internally, Lanz was getting angrier by the second at the bear girl. But from what the guild master had said, the girl hadn't been at fault. In fact, she'd been the victim of the attack, so he hadn't even punished her.

"Lanz, please stop," I said. "The guild master already explained that she wasn't to blame."

But Lanz was still furious. For whatever reason, he just liked Deboranay too much to let it go.

By then, we'd made such a scene that the guild master had to come over. That was when he suggested a compromise. "Just take Yuna here with you. We know for sure she's stronger than Deboranay."

That was apparently the girl's name—Yuna.

Could we really swap out Deboranay for this bear girl? If she really was as strong as everyone said, I guess it'd be fine, but she didn't seem to like the idea.

But I was starting to cotton to things. If she was as strong as everyone thought, we'd be able to complete the quest without any failures on our record, and we'd get the quest fee too.

Still, nothing good would come from Lanz talking with her, so I intervened between the two of them. First, I introduced our group, then I gave her specifics about the quest and how completing it would be difficult without our final party member. Once I was done explaining everything to her, she said the unthinkable...

"Leave the quest to me. All of it. You can take credit for its success. I'll also

give you all the money. In return, make sure that Deboranay never involves himself with me ever again.”

The part about Deboranay was fine, but entrusting the quest to her alone? No matter how strong she was, she couldn’t fight them all on her own. If I fought goblins one at a time, I could take out fifty. But if it were just me against fifty all at once, that was something else. Not that I was *sure* I couldn’t do it, but it wasn’t guaranteed.

Fighting that many monsters came with other issues: you had to check your flanks, time your magic right, and take all sorts of dangers into consideration. Your party members were supposed to help tackle all of that.

Thinking about it sensibly, I couldn’t let her go by herself.

Lanz and I rejected the idea, so Yuna asked for me to go with her. *Just* me, and no one else. She said it was because I had common sense, and I couldn’t deny that I liked the compliment.

I also wanted to know how strong Yuna was since she had defeated Deboranay, so I accepted.

So much for common sense, I guess.

We were supposed to travel three hours on foot, but we got there in half an hour—and I’d been carried there in Yuna’s arms like a new bride.

Yuna explained that her bear clothes amplified her strength. With something like that, she could have easily beaten Deboranay.

We met with the chief of the village, then headed to where he said the goblins were located.

I wondered: just who was Yuna, really? She had magic that let her know where monsters were—but what even *was* that? Meanwhile, Yuna singlehandedly plowed through the goblins we encountered, rapidly advancing without fail. Maybe she actually hadn’t needed me at all. After all, I was only harvesting mana gems and taking care of the bodies.

Yuna stopped walking. Apparently, the goblin nest was in the cave ahead of

us. She slayed the goblins around the entrance, then launched flames into the cave before sealing up the opening. I guess she was going with death by suffocation.

And so there we were, taking a break right in front of a *goblin nest*. By any normal reckoning, that'd be considered completely insane.

After a while, Yuna tilted her head.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"One of them is still alive."

It was a goblin king, then: it had to be. When I told Yuna that, she removed the rock blocking the entrance. A goblin much larger than your usual sort stood there, wielding a sinister-looking sword. Yep, that was *definitely* a goblin king.

And Yuna faced it on her own. She absolutely dominated the battle. I watched her trap the goblin king in a hole she'd dug using magic before pummeling it with offensive spells from above.

I didn't know whether that'd work or not, but in any case, we weren't fighting that horrid monster head-on. Once Yuna finished attacking it, she brought the ground back up to reveal the prostrated goblin king, a gruesome and furious look marring its face.

"Is it over...?" I asked Yuna. She nodded.

I was relieved, but what followed after that was downright hellish. I was supposed to harvest all the mana gems from the goblins in the cave...every single one. I asked Yuna to help, but she said no.

Well, I guess I did agree to take on this part. Yuna loaned me a bear-shaped light and I headed into the cave on my own. I found a lot of dead goblins in there, as expected. Jeez, did I really have to harvest all of these mana gems on my own?

I got to work harvesting the gems under the illumination of the bear light. Once I finished, I left the cave, rubbing my back all the while—and found a square building sitting outside, made from earthen walls.

I didn't even have to wonder who had made it. Yuna was the *only* person it

could have been. I found a head-sized hole in the wall, so I peeked inside and, in there, I found Yuna sleeping. I couldn't believe it: after all my work harvesting the mana gems, she'd been laying there, napping!

"Yuna! Yuna! Wake up!!!" Since there was no door, I yelled through the small hole.

Yuna blearily rubbed her eyes. "Rulina, you're being too loud..."

I let her know that I had finished harvesting the gems, so we headed back to Crimonia that same day.

And—of course—she carried me in her arms just like a princess on the way back. I asked if she could put me down once we got close to town, but she just ignored my pleading. The gate guard gave us some odd looks.

And that is how I met the bear girl, Yuna.

Chapter 3:

Encounter with the Bear

Elena's Chronicles

TODAY, I WAS WATCHING over the store on my own again. It was almost dinnertime, so mom and dad were both busy preparing for that.

My job was to clean the tables and floors, do the laundry, and check in guests. It was a bit after rush hour when I finished everything. I was taking a break at the counter when the door opened and a girl came in, dressed head-to-toe in black.

No, a...*bear*? The girl who had come in was dressed as an adorable bear.

“W-welcome...?” I managed to collect myself and look at the bear girl.

She came over to me and said she wanted lodging. We were an inn, so naturally she could stay here. Still, no one had come in with her. Was she alone? Where was her family?

“Of course you can stay here.”

Why would her family—why would *anyone*—leave such an adorable girl all on her own? While those questions occupied my thoughts, I explained the fees and went over meal arrangements. She asked for ten nights of room and board.

She was particularly excited when I told her about the bath for some reason. If she didn't know that most inns had baths, then this was probably her first time staying in one. Could she afford it, though? Mmm, her bear clothes did seem to be made from high-quality fur.

I had seen all kinds of guests up over my time here, but I never even imagined I'd get a guest like this.

With furs like that, she might've been part of the aristocracy. Just in case, I made sure to be as polite as I could. After I finished explaining things to her, she paid me for all ten nights up front. That's when I noticed her hands. She was wearing a pair of positively adorable bear gloves! They were so cute that when I

went to take the money, I couldn't help it... I just had to hold onto that little hand and give it a squeeze.

"Whoa!" I managed to catch myself, at least. "I'm sorry. It was just so cute. So that was, ah, ten days with meals, correct? I'll get today's meal prepared right away, so please take a seat and wait. Oh, and I'm the innkeeper's daughter, Elena. Nice to meet you!"

"I'm Yuna. Looking forward to my stay."

So her name was Yuna. I suppose I hadn't upset her then. Thank goodness.

I let my parents know that we probably had an aristocrat staying with us, and they asked me if I was completely sure. I guess I didn't *completely* know, but I made sure to mention those expensive-looking fur bear clothes and the fact that she'd paid for ten full nights in one lump sum.

My parents seemed a little at a loss. In the end, they used the ingredients we had at the shop to make a delicious dinner. Miss Yuna seemed to like the food, which gave us some relief.

After dinner I guided her to her room. It was a bit on the smaller side, but plenty big enough for one person. I'd move her to a different room if she complained. Fortunately, Miss Yuna just thanked me and headed inside.

After a short while, Miss Yuna came back down. She said she wanted to take a bath and when I offered to show her there, she accepted.

It really did seem to be the first time she used a bath at an inn. I explained everything from start to finish, but what really struck me was how she marveled at the hot water coming out of the mana gem. It seemed almost unbelievable that she wouldn't know about something so mundane.

I was a bit worried, to be honest, but Miss Yuna thanked me after she got out of the bath and headed to her room. She seemed to know her manners, so I assumed she'd been raised right.

I knew it—she really was an aristocrat, wasn't she?

The next day, Miss Yuna got up early and ate breakfast, thoroughly enjoying it.

I was pondering where she had come from when she asked me where the adventurers' guild was.

"Why are you going there?" I asked, curious.

"Well, I was thinking of becoming an adventurer."

An adventurer? But she seemed so young! I knew the age requirement for adventurers was only thirteen, but kids normally worked with older people. Sometimes brothers, sisters, parents, or friends would become adventurers together, but few applied all on their own. Maybe a down-on-their-luck orphan would do that, but I couldn't think of anyone else who would.

Still, Miss Yuna didn't seem like she was an orphan or like she was having a hard time. Unless...perhaps she'd run away from her noble estate?

I tried asking in a roundabout way. "So do you have adventurer friends?"

It'd be one thing if she knew another adventurer, but it didn't sit right with me to see a small girl going out on adventures all alone.

I'd been watching rookie adventurers since I was young. More times than I liked, I'd send adventurers off in the morning with a smile...and their belongings would sit in their rooms, waiting for people who would never come back from their quests. Sometimes when the adventurers *did* come back, they would be seriously injured.

And yet this young girl wanted to become one of them.

"I don't," said the girl. "Wait, can I not become an adventurer without a referral?"

"No, there's nothing like that."

Miss Yuna looked relieved when I said that, but still, she didn't know any adventurers. I wanted to stop her, but she thanked me and left the inn before I could say anything otherwise. And even if I was worried for her, I still had a job to do.

For the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, I worried about the bear girl going to the adventurers' guild. But we offered meals at our inn, which made the place pretty busy come afternoon, and the supper rush wiped my worries away for a while. That is, until I started to hear talk of bears. I couldn't help but turn an ear over to the conversation.

"I heard this girl dressed like a bear knocked out an adventurer. Is that true?"

"Yeah, that's right. Naturally, I was worried, so I went to keep an eye on her. It was ridiculous! D-Rank Deboranay couldn't land a hit on her. Total beatdown, man."

"Really?! Man, wish I could've seen that!"

"The fight after that was something else too. Whole buncha adventurers ganged up on the bear, and she just sent people flyin'!"

"C'mon, you gotta be kidding me."

The guild staff laughed, but that bear girl must have been Miss Yuna. Who was she, anyway? How had she taken down a D-Rank adventurer?

I was still bewildered when Miss Yuna returned for lunch. We were too busy for me to ask her about it, but... Hmm. Maybe there'd be time later in the evening?

It was now noon, several days later. We were as busy as usual when I overheard the word 'bear' again. I decided to eavesdrop again.

"Hey, you heard about the bear?"

"Nope, not a word."

"They say she slayed a hundred goblins and a goblin king all by herself!"

"Pssht! If you're gonna spin me some crap like that, at least make it sound believable."

"Really, it's the truth!"

One hundred goblins and a goblin king? Yeah, I wouldn't take that seriously

either, and I don't even know that much about monsters.

But someone new joined their conversation. "Yup, he's right. I saw it myself, up close and personal."

"Really?"

"Really. After Rulina brought out those hundred goblin mana gems, I saw the bear drag out the goblin king himself."

"Are you serious...? But could the bear really do that?"

"Seems plausible. This is a *bear* we're talking about, after all."

They started really getting into talking about her, but then left after they finished their meals. I'd wanted to hear a bit more about the bear, but that was that.

A few more days passed, and there was even more news: this time, a bear had slayed *tigerwolves*. Miss Yuna, just what kind of person are you?!

STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 2



NOA THE BEAR LOVER APPEARS!

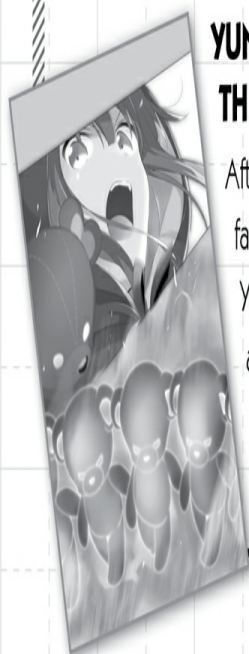
The bear house becomes the talk of the town in Crimonia when Yuna is summoned by the feudal lord, Cliff. Upon heading to his estate, she finds out that his daughter Noa wants to talk with her. Yuna introduces Noa to her bear summons Kumayuru and Kumakyu right away, and the girl is soon captivated by all things bear.

LET'S CURE FINA'S MOTHER, TIERMINA!

Fina makes an abrupt visit to the bear house. It turns out the girl's mother, Tiermina, isn't doing so well. Yuna immediately goes to Fina's home and uses her healing magic on Tiermina. When she is cured, both Fina and her little sister Shuri are overjoyed. In the heat of the moment, Gentz, who had been looking after Fina's family, asks Tiermina to marry him.

YUNA LEARNS ABOUT THE STATE OF THE ORPHANAGE...

After Gentz and Tiermina decide to marry, Fina's family settles into a new home. In addition, Yuna offers the goblin king's sword to Cliff as an offering for the king. She even slays a black viper that had appeared in a nearby village



with bear magic. All in all, she's having a blast in this new world.

Later, as Yuna takes a stroll through the town, she notices some grimy children. Worried for the kids, Yuna accompanies them to the orphanage where they live. Once Yuna learns that they've been deprived of financial assistance by the feudal lord, Yuna plans to use the kokekko eggs she saw in the village once attacked by the black viper to help them. By selling these eggs, they can rebuild the orphanage bit by bit. Yuna manages to enter into a contract with Milaine from the Merchants Guild, and—retaliating against the feudal lord for cutting off financial assistance to the orphans—she tacks on the stipulation that no eggs will be sold to Crimonia's lordship. Lord Cliff comes in to question her. After listening to Yuna's reasoning, he quickly finds and exposes the real culprit behind the orphanage's financial troubles and apologizes to Yuna.

OH YEAH, LET'S MAKE PUDDING!

Having obtained a ton of eggs, Yuna sets her mind on making Japanese-style pudding. From the very start, the pudding is a huge hit with Fina and the other kids. When Yuna visits Noa with pudding for a taste test, Cliff asks her to escort Noa to the royal capital for the king's birthday festival. Yuna accepts the quest and gets Tiermina's permission to bring Fina along on the adventure too.



Story:

Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear 2

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Chapter 4:

Encounter with the Bear

Cliff's Chronicles

I RECEIVED A STRANGE report from the gate guards today.

Normally, these matters never reach me. The officer in charge of the gate guard's station ordinarily handles such issues in my stead. If reports *did* reach me, it was only because the issues had escalated to a level too serious for the guard captains to deal with alone.

I thought a real problem had come up, but it seemed it was just a report about a girl who had entered the town without a residence card or a guild card on hand. Well, that was nothing out of the ordinary: sometimes people entered town without identification.

But as I read on, I found that the girl had, apparently, been dressed as a bear. What was that supposed to mean? Dressed as a bear *how*?

The only other information they included was that she had no criminal record. A girl "dressed as a bear" with no identification and no criminal record. I had no idea what I was supposed to do with this.

If she didn't have a criminal record, then there wasn't any problem. They didn't need to report to me whenever they saw someone wearing a bear pelt.

I decided to ignore it and reached for the next document.

Several days later, I received a petition from the adventurers' guild.

It seemed that a girl dressed as a bear had become an adventurer, and now, there was some potential trouble looming. I was asked to inform the town guards that any scuffles involving other adventurers would be handled directly by the guild.

A girl dressed as a bear had become an adventurer...? I suppose she was the

same one who'd come into town a few days ago. But why was the adventurers' guild, of all places, going to all this trouble to inform me of all people? I couldn't wrap my head around it.

I slipped the petition onto my desk, but it slipped farther than I intended, falling to the floor. My butler, Rondo, picked it up from where it fell as he arrived with tea.

"Does this concern the matter of the bear?" he asked.

"Yes, it's part of that bizarre debacle," I replied. "But this is a petition from the master of the adventurers' guild. I can't simply ignore it."

"Ah, I see. It is about *that* incident."

"What incident? You know of it?"

"I have heard murmurings. They say there was a rampaging bear at the adventurers' guild."

"Rampaging at the adventurers' guild?"

"Indeed. A bear arrived at the guild to register, and adventurers attempted to start a fight with it."

"And that's what this petition is about?" The guild should have been a neutral ground for disputes between adventurers, but this was a petition from the guild master himself.

I wrote a brief letter to the captain of the guard and sent Rondo out to deliver it.

I was hard at work as usual that day when Rondo arrived with tea.

"Lord Cliff, have you heard the latest rumor about the bear?" he asked.

"No, nothing has come up since that report. Do you have news?" Curiosity was getting the better of me now, so I decided to take a break.

According to Rondo, she'd hunted dozens of wolves in the days since registering at the guild. On top of that, she had gone goblin slaying and defeated a hundred goblins, along with a goblin king that was unlucky enough

to be in the area.

“Is that true...?” I murmured. A goblin king was a fiendish monster indeed. Its leadership could turn goblin underlings into a troublesome force to be dealt with. Even alone, the goblin king was a tough enough that several adventurers were needed to bring it down.

The hundred goblins were already mindboggling enough. The woman must’ve been a hulk of a warrior if she could handle a goblin king—a six-and-a-half foot giant, at the very least.

“And you say she’s a *woman*?” I asked.

“Yes. I hear that she is indeed female.”

What kind of woman was she? I was frightened to find out.

I was having dinner with my daughter Noa that day when she told me she had seen the bear out on a walk. Apparently, she’d been taking care of some adventurers who had picked a fight with her. According to my own daughter, this bear-clad woman was powerful and...*cute*.

Cute though? From what Rondo had said, I understood that she was strong, but a bear pelt hardly seemed like an adorable fashion accessory, no matter how hard I tried to imagine it.

My daughter seemed excited to talk about the bear, so I regaled her with the stories Rondo had told me.

Several days after that, Rondo brought tea and further news of the bear with him. I always wondered where he was obtaining such information.

“It seems she slayed two tigerwolves,” he told me.

“By herself?” Tigerwolves and goblin kings usually took a team of people to slay. Only a top-class adventurer could have done so alone.

“That is what I hear, milord.”

While I’d welcome any adventurer with such amazing skills into town, I still wanted to keep my distance. I couldn’t help but imagine a truly massive woman

in a fearsome bear pelt. When I mentioned my impression of the bear girl, Rondo informed me the reality was quite different.

“I’m afraid she’s a rather adorable young girl,” he told me.

“A *girl*?!”

“That’s right. I was only able to catch a glimpse of her from a distance. However, based on the guild regulations, she must be thirteen years of age at minimum.”

“Thirteen?” I repeated. “Rondo, are you playing me for a fool?” Truly, what thirteen-year-old adventurer could slay goblin kings and tigerwolves all on their own?!

“I am certainly not mocking you, Lord Cliff.”

“You’re telling me a *thirteen-year-old girl* slayed a goblin king and a tigerwolf?!”

“So it appears, milord. The mana gems and corpses of the goblin king and tigerwolves were verified to be authentic.”

“I can’t believe this...”

“She also was wearing an adorable bear costume, just as Lady Noir said.” A smile snuck its way onto Rondo’s face as he recalled it.

I didn’t understand. Bears were supposed to be ferocious. How could one make a bear outfit look adorable? It was an actual bear pelt...wasn’t it?

While I drank my tea, I scanned the document at the top of my stack. It was from a gate guard, and...ah.

Of course.

As I reviewed the contents, I realized it was about the bear girl we had just been talking about. The report described a bear adventurer summoning bears.

A *bear* had summoned *bears*? Perhaps I should push for a little more clarity in these reports, because this was positively absurd. Still...

“Rondo, do you know anything about this?” I passed the guard report to him.

He scanned it, then nodded. “Yes, I have heard murmurings about this. As I

understand it, instead of riding a horse, the girl dressed as a bear summons bears to ride. She has two in her possession.”

“A pair of bears?!”

“A black one and a white one, if I’m not mistaken.”

So the bear girl really did summon bear summons? Was I hearing that right? That...sounded like a real once-in-a-lifetime sight, actually.

At dinner the next day, my daughter told me she had seen a bear house. A bear...house? Again, my imagination failed me as I tried to imagine it but seemed that the aforementioned bear girl lived in her bear house, presumably with her pair of bear summons. Noir had apparently waited there to see the bear, but the opportunity had never presented itself.

“If you want to meet her, why don’t we invite her over?” I proposed. Noir was delighted by the idea.

I instructed Rondo to gather information about the bear and, if she didn’t seem dangerous, to issue an invitation.

What kind of girl would show up? I must admit, I was excited to find out.

Chapter 5:

Encounter with the Bear

Noa's Chronicles

I HADN'T ENJOYED an outing for quite some time. Everyone is always going on and on about my studies—which is oh-so-vexing—but right now, I really needed a change of pace. For that reason, I was strolling along in the town. I did so hope to find something interesting soon...

“Hey you there! Weird-lookin’ girl!” a man yelled at someone from nearby. Was trouble stirring? How unpleasant...

“I know you’re a rookie,” the man continued. “What? Haven’t got time to even say hello to me?!”

“I don’t,” replied the girl in question.

It seemed like they were having an argument. I searched for the voices and found an adventurer and...a bear? Or, at least, a girl dressed as one? Or...maybe she really *was* a bear?

Dressed in black, bear-ish clothes, she sure did look like one. Now, closer up, I could see that she was also wearing bears on her hands—one black and the other white.

I was so shocked that I found myself just staring at her and her bear costume. She seemed a bit older than me, maybe around thirteen years of age.

Four adventurers were picking on the bear girl.

There were a lot of uncivilized people who were adventurers, so I rather disliked them. Worse yet, no one nearby was trying to help the girl. As for myself, I wanted to help, but I didn’t know what I could even do for her current situation.

“You tryin’ to make a mockery of us adventurers with that getup?!”

That girl was an adventurer? Now that was a shock.

“I’m not mocking anything,” she told them. “My look is my own business.”

“We’ve been in this longer than you, rookie. You gotta put some respect on that tone of yours!”

“For being oh-so-experienced, you seem pretty green yourselves.”

“We’re still higher up the ladder, girly, even if it’s only by three months.”

The bear just looked at the four adventurers and laughed. Her attitude made them even more upset.

People started speaking up:

“Stop that!”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you...”

“You’re gonna get yourselves killed...!”

I thought they were talking to the bear girl, but...no, they were trying to warn the four adventurers. But I doubted the four heard a word, and it seemed too late anyway.

The moment one of the men grabbed the girl by the shoulder, she sent him flying through the air. All of a sudden, it seemed like mankind had mastered flight...

She moved on and threw the second. Then the third. Before long, all four of them were up in the air.

I looked up into the sky—they were practically the size of a grain of rice in the sky. I could barely make them out anymore, they were so small.

“Aaaaaaaah!”

“M-Mommyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!”

“Saaave meee!”

“...”

One by one, the adventurers began to fall.

People couldn’t fly, after all—everyone knew that. They were falling, and they were going to die. Even a child like me understood that anyone who falls from

such a height isn't going to get back up, and they were headed straight for the ground.

Right at that moment, the bear girl did something. Dust blew up from the ground, the adventurers hit the earth, and...I think everyone must've been convinced that this was the end of them.

But the adventurers hadn't died. They were launched back into the sky a second time.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Mommyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!"

"It keeps happeniiiiing!"

"..."

Again and again, I watched the adventurers get thrown into the sky and plummet back down. Finally, they landed one final time...softly. They collapsed onto the ground and not a single one of them attempted to get up. They were foaming at the mouths and their eyes had rolled to the back of their heads.

What a splendid bear...!

The bear approached the adventurers. She reached toward them with her bear hand, which spouted water from its mouth at the men's faces. She was forcing them awake.

When the men saw the girl, they trembled...and not because the water was ice-cold. The men apologized so profusely their heads scraped the ground. The bear girl left as though she didn't care in the slightest.

What a terrible thing I had witnessed.

I excitedly told my father about the whole horrific affair.

"Oh, the bear from the rumors?" he said.

"You know about the bear, Father?"

"Reports are coming in from all over about her."

It seemed she was something of a celebrity.

“Father, please tell me about the bear,” I begged him.

Then he told me the most fanciful of tales. In the few days since registering as an adventurer, she had slayed scores of wolves, a hundred goblins, and even a goblin king.

A goblin king! I had heard of those. They were more brutal than mere goblins and much stronger. Several adventurers needed to unite just to slay a single one.

The bear girl had to be amazing if she could slay such a monster.

But that wasn’t all. She had also defeated tigerwolves. Those monsters are even larger than normal wolves—we had one of their pelts at home, and it was huge! Was I to believe that the bear girl had slain one of those? I simply couldn’t.

I was finished with my studies for today and had free time that afternoon, so I went out to search the town. I wanted to meet the bear. Maybe I could find her at the adventurers’ guild. As I walked, pondering it over, I overheard some villagers talking about something new.

“You saw the bear house?”

“They must’ve built it while no one was looking.”

“I hear a bear lives there too!”

“Wait, a bear? Like, *the* bear?”

A bear house? I didn’t understand. What kind of house was that? Since I was curious, I used the information I had learned from eavesdropping to go in search of it myself.

It wasn’t exactly hard to find. A crowd of people had gathered around it to look at it from afar. I could see the bear house I’d heard about from between the gaps of the crowd.

Okay, yes, it really *was* a bear house. Our town had a resident bear. This was

the bear's house. And...maybe I could see the bear that lived there?

I waited there for a while, but I never saw her.

What a disappointment.

Later, I told my father about my day.

"If you want to meet her," said Father, "why don't we invite her over?"

"Do you truly mean it?"

"Sure, I'd like to meet her too."

I was so happy. I was finally going to meet the bear. I couldn't help but look forward to it.

Today was the long-awaited day... Today was the day the bear would visit.

I had to study until the bear arrived, but I was so anxious that I couldn't focus at all. I fidgeted restlessly the whole time until our maid, Lala, came to my room. Was she here to say the bear had arrived? I guess she could see how excited I was, because Lala smiled when she told me that yes, the bear was here. I made sure not to run (although I very much wanted to) as Lala and I headed to the room where the bear was waiting.

The bear was just on the other side of the door. Lala knocked and then the door swung open. What kind of person would she be? Would she let me give her a hug?

Giddy as I could be, I headed into the room to meet the bear...

Chapter 6:

Encounter with the Bear

Tiermina's Chronicles

THANKS TO A MYSTERIOUS GIRL who dressed as a bear, I recovered from my illness. I never imagined that I would be released from my suffering. I'd always thought that would happen when I passed on. I never thought I'd return to the days when I lived happily with my daughters. I'd never be able to thank the girl dressed as a bear—Yuna—enough.

When I told her I wanted to compensate her, she smiled and said something entirely ridiculous.

"I want you two to live together for Fina and her sister's sakes."

Gentz really had been helping us since my husband had passed away. He prepared medicine for me when I got sick and recommended my daughter for work. I worked with him during my adventurer days, so it wasn't like I didn't know him. We had come to rely on him these last few years. He was good to my daughter and took care of her. If anyone asked whether I loved him, I wouldn't know what to say. If anyone asked whether I disliked him, I could say I didn't. Regardless of that, I was happy when Gentz genuinely told me he loved me. In that moment, I felt like I loved him back.

My daughters blessed our marriage. I was taken aback by how happy Gentz seemed when that happened. We looked for a place all four of us could live and moved to a new house.

The move went by quickly, thanks to Yuna. She really was doing nothing but taking care of us. Even if I wanted to pay her back, I didn't know how I could. Of course, I didn't consider getting married to Gentz a form of paying her back. She wanted us to get married because she was thinking of us. She saved my daughter from monsters and shared her food with us. My daughters and I were indebted to her to an extent we would never be able to pay back except bit by bit.

Anyway, since I was better, I needed to start working. We only had so much money. Gentz was working at the adventurers' guild, but buying the house had eaten into his savings. We also couldn't bet on none of us getting sick in the future. We needed something in reserve if that happened.

"Maybe I'll work as an adventurer," I said to everyone while we were eating. "I can slay wolves, so I was thinking of accepting lower-ranked quests."

I was a former adventurer. I could take on a wolf on my own. That would ease our finances and let us build up some savings. I thought it was a great idea when I told everyone, but they were all against it.

"No way. I won't let you do something that dangerous."

"It'll be fine. Gentz, you know as well as I do that I can at least slay wolves."

"How many years do you think it's been since you retired as an adventurer? You've got an employment gap. It's too dangerous!"

Gentz was extremely against it.

"That's right, Mom. It's dangerous."

"Mom, you can't do anything scary."

My daughters clung to me from the left and right.

"It'll be all right. I won't do anything reckless. Besides, we need the money."

"Are you planning on dying and leaving your kids behind?! Is that how little you trust me to be the breadwinner?!"

"That's not what I'm saying. We used a lot of money for the move, and we'll probably need more from here."

"I'll work," said Fina. "I'll talk to Yuna and get a lot of butchering work." Now even my daughter has started to say that sort of thing.

I tried everything I could to persuade them, but Gentz got mad, my daughters burst into tears, and we ended up having an arduous meal. Considering all of my family members' opposition, I gave up on being an adventurer, and we came to an agreement that I find a job through the merchant guild.

They were all incurable worrywarts.

The next day, I headed toward the merchant guild in search of a job. I ran into Yuna outside. She asked me why I was at the guild, so I explained our family meeting to her. She said something unbelievable.

“Tiermina, would you actually be interested in working for me?”

She told me she was starting a business and invited me onboard. We went to Yuna’s house so we could talk about the details. I was always taken aback by the bear house, no matter how many times I saw it.

She meant to sell eggs. On top of that, she already bought a plot of land near the orphanage and had made a building. Apparently she was going to prep the birds and start bringing in tons of them. I listened to her in shock. Wasn’t she supposed to be an *adventurer*?

Even though she kept telling me, “I’m doing this for myself, since I just want to eat eggs,” I knew she was really doing it for the orphans. She’s just a really good kid. This kindhearted, bear-suited girl saved Fina, helped me, and gave Gentz and I the push we needed. That was why I accepted the job right away. I wanted to pay back even the smallest amount of my debt and to help Yuna as she tried her best to do this for the orphans.

When I went to the merchant guild and we talked out the details, I realized this would involve a great deal of money. Regardless of that, Yuna tried to entrust me with all of the sales. I was happy she had confidence in me, but that was just too much money. In the end, we distributed the sales by depositing them between my guild card and Yuna’s. I would manage the money for wages and necessary expenses. The rest of the sales would be put on Yuna’s guild card.

I wondered if Yuna just didn’t know how to handle money, but as I watched her do everything, I realized she wasn’t doing this to turn a profit. If I asked her about it, I’m sure she would have told me she was doing it for the eggs. That was just the kindhearted girl she was.

With that, I started my job. At first there weren’t many birds, but Yuna brought them in from out of nowhere, and the population steadily began to increase. Eggs could be sold for a high price while there weren’t many around,

but when supply increased, their price would go down too. Considering that and the labor, I thought it would have been easier to keep supply low and sell them at a markup. However, Yuna smiled and told me that if there were more eggs around and they were cheaper, everyone would be able to eat them.

According to Yuna's logic, if the eggs were valuable, there was a chance they'd attract thieves, and that would potentially put the orphans in danger. On the other hand, if eggs were cheap, there would be no incentive to steal them, and we wouldn't be putting the orphans at risk.

All she was thinking about were the orphans and how to make it so that anyone could have access to eggs. Was this girl really fifteen? If she told me she was a merchant's daughter, I probably would have believed her. She was a kindhearted girl and an important friend to my daughter. I would work as hard as I could to repay even a sliver of my debt to her.

But since she was paying my wages, was I really repaying her?

Well, I have work today, too. Time to put my all into it.



ILLUSTRATION GALLERY



STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 3



A SECOND BEAR HOUSE IN THE ROYAL CAPITAL!

After Yuna accepts a quest to be Noa's escort to the capital, she brings Fina along with her and they start their journey...but they run into some trouble on the way. They rescue a noble by the name of Gran and his granddaughter, Misa, from monsters, and it turns out that they're acquaintances of Noa! Yuna also captures some bandits they happened upon, but all in all, they make it safely to the capital. Once they arrive at Noa's house, Yuna is surprised by how young her mother Ellelaura looks. Noa's older sister, Shia, also challenges Yuna to a duel. Finally, Yuna and Fina end up staying at Noa's house, although Fina ends up a little mentally worn out from being around aristocrats all the time. To avoid having to deal with that next time, Yuna sets out to build a bear house in the capital and purchases a plot of land to immediately begin construction.



THE CASTLE TOUR AND THE PICTURE BOOK.

Yuna heads out to tour the capital, finds spuds to make potato chips, becomes acquainted with the adventurers' guild master Sanya, and finds cheese to make pizza. All the while, she's having her fill of fun. On top of that, while

on a guided castle tour with Ellelaura, Princess Flora takes a liking to Yuna. Fond of the princess herself, Yuna draws a picture book for her.



LET'S SLAY TEN THOUSAND MONSTERS!

As she's enjoying the capital, Yuna learns that there's an uproar at the adventurers' guild. It turns out that a horde of monsters is fast approaching. When Noa worries about Cliff, who's still on his way to the capital, Yuna heads out and annihilates all ten thousand monsters to give Noa peace of mind. She meets up with Cliff and they return to the capital. Having unexpectedly rescued the kingdom from a crisis, Yuna reluctantly agrees to meet with the king. During her audience with His Majesty, Yuna sees Flora again and offers the royal family pudding, much to their approval.

MEETING THE BAKERS

While walking around the capital, Yuna discovers a scrumptious bakery. It turns out the baker, Morin, is in trouble because of her late husband's loans. Once Yuna learns of their plight, she invites Morin and her daughter, Karin, to come and work at her own shop that's opening in Crimonia. Later while they're discussing future plans in the bear house, debt collectors arrive and insult the king...who has just shown up to request some pudding. The debt collectors are immediately arrested. After they enjoy the festivities of the king's birthday celebration, Morin and Karin promise to meet Yuna in Crimonia, so she heads home.

Story:

Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear 3

A Second Bear House in the Royal Capital!

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Chapter 7:

Noa Looks Forward to Going Out with the Bears

APPARENTLY, I WOULD be accompanying Yuna to the capital.

Father must've seen how happy I was as we ate, because he warned me: "Make sure you don't get in Yuna's way."

But I would never dream of it. I would never, ever do anything to make Yuna hate me. Why, if she hated me, she might never let me ride her bears again! On top of that, I wouldn't be able to eat that delicious pudding anymore. And just remembering the pudding made me want more of it, so upsetting Yuna would clearly be unacceptable.

"Make sure to keep an eye on Yuna when you see Ellelaura," Father continued. "I'll write a letter too, just in case. But if Ellelaura seems like she's going to do anything rash, make sure to stop her."

I doubted that Mother would do anything terrible to Yuna, but she might make fun of her. I hoped she wouldn't laugh upon seeing Yuna's outfit. I needed to be careful and make sure that didn't happen. Plus, if Mother was too rash and made trouble for Yuna, she might hate me for that instead...

"I understand!" I said. "I'll do everything in my power to encourage Mother to behave."

"Remember, I'm counting on you," Father said.

I was going to do the best I could for the bears.

I finished getting ready for tomorrow, got out of the bath, and started thinking about the day to come. We were going by bear instead of by carriage, and I was on cloud nine thinking about how I'd be with the bears for multiple days while traveling to the capital.

"Tomorrow can't come soon enough!" I said.

“It will if you go to bed early.” Our maid, Lala, talked with me while brushing my hair before bed. She was very gentle and careful as she brushed. “You really do love bears so much, Lady Noir.”

“Why, of course I do. They’re so soft and warm, I can’t help but look forward to seeing them.”

I couldn’t forget how the bears felt back then. They’d been comfortable enough that I’d fallen asleep.

“You’re quite right,” said Lala. “I was frightened of them at first, but when Miss Yuna let me come near them, I realized that they were very good bears indeed.”

“Yeah! And when I call them, they listen to me. I asked them to let me ride them and they crouched down. When I asked them to stop, they did. Oh, they’re so unbearably adorable. I would like my own pair of bears as well.”

Just thinking about it, I could barely hold still, turning my head back and forth. Lala had to grab me to help keep in place. It kind of hurt...

“That’s not possible,” said Lala with a laugh. “Those bears are Miss Yuna’s summons. You can’t put Miss Yuna on the spot by saying *you* want them.”

“Oh, I know. I’m still looking forward to tomorrow so much.”

Lala told me she had finished with my hair. I thanked her, then went to my bed.

“You’ll need to sleep early for tomorrow,” said Lala. “I’m going to turn out the lights now. Have a good night.” One by one, Lala began to extinguish the lights.

“Mmm. Goodnight, Lala.”

“Goodnight, Lady Noir.”

Even though I’d been so excited for tomorrow, I was asleep in a blink of the eye.

I woke up very early the next day, probably because I’d fallen asleep so early the night before. It seemed like Lala had just woken up, so she seemed

surprised to see me.

“Why, Lady Noir, you’re up so early!”

“I went right to sleep last night. Now I just need to wait for Yuna to come.”

“I will prepare your meal. Please, just wait for a moment.”

While I was eating breakfast, Father came over. He seemed surprised to see me awake so early. Was it really that unusual for me to be up at this time? How rude of them to think that.

Once I was done with breakfast, I stood from my seat. “I’m going to wait for Yuna outside.”

“Isn’t it a little early?” asked Father.

“She might come early!” I insisted. I went to my room to get my item bag, then I headed outside. *Please come soon, Yuna!*

But no matter how long I waited, Yuna didn’t arrive. She was late! But when Lala came to check on me, she said it wasn’t actually time for her to arrive yet. How strange. Lala asked me to wait inside, but I insisted upon staying outside.

Finally, Yuna arrived. She was in her bear clothes, as per usual. How adorable! Then I noticed a girl about my age next to Yuna. Oh my, who was that? Well, let’s get to scolding Yuna first.

“You’re *late*, Yuna!”

She actually wasn’t, but I’d still waited for her. I put my hand on my hip and pretended to fume. Yuna paid me no mind, though, and just told me I should’ve waited inside.

She had a point, I suppose.

While I walked with Yuna, I grew steadily more and more curious about the girl hiding behind her. Yuna asked me if she could come with us to the capital. I thought it would’ve been nice to go alone together with Yuna. But if I said no, would Yuna have hated me?

I agreed to it, but there was one thing I was not giving up to this girl.

“I hope you know I’m not giving up my spot on the bear.” I declared to the girl.

“I’m going to have you ride together,” Yuna said, so I had no choice regardless.

“I suppose that’s fine,” I said, pointing at the girl, “but I’m riding in front.”

After that, we got permission from Father for the girl to come with us and headed for the capital. The girl’s name was apparently Fina. How did she know Yuna? I was oh-so-curious, but Fina seemed too nervous to hold a conversation.

Most other kids wouldn’t come near me when they learned I was part of the aristocracy. When I had asked Lala about why that was once, she told me they were frightened of the punishment that would come if they disrespected me... but, of course, I would never ask for such a thing in the first place.

Somehow, I managed to get Fina to talk to me about different things. I learned that she was ten—the same age as me. Yuna had saved her from wolves in the forest, and that was how they’d met.

“Fina bailed me out when I was lost in the forest, back when I first came here,” said Yuna.

“That did happen,” said Fina, “but Yuna was the one who saved me from a wolf attack. I just led her to town.”

From there, Yuna had apparently asked Fina to harvest the monsters she’d defeated. I was surprised to learn that Fina *could* harvest monsters, but I was much more jealous of their relationship.

I wanted to ask Fina more about Yuna, but I was attacked by a bout of drowsiness. I’d woken up early today to wait for Yuna, so I was a bit tired. And it was so comfortable riding atop Kumayuru that I slipped steadily into dreamland.

I tried to shake away that feeling, but I was no match against it.

“Lady Noir. Lady Noir!”

Someone was calling my name. I opened my eyes to find a girl... Fina, wasn’t

it?

I yawned, then realized where we were. I was on top of Kumayuru. I had fallen asleep so suddenly. Now, I looked around to find that Yuna was getting a meal ready.

“Lady Noir,” said Fina, “we’re going to be eating soon.”

“Thank you. I suppose I nodded off.”

Fina was so nice. I hoped that we would become fast friends. And we had plenty of time: the road to the capital was long, after all. Yes, I’d absolutely make sure we were friends by the time we reached the capital. First, I would use something we had in common—the bears—to create an opportunity for us to get to know each other.

Chapter 8:

Encounter with the Bear

Ellelaura's Chronicles

I WAS HARD AT WORK in a room in the castle today, as per usual. Such wearisome work, but alas, a job is a job. His Majesty's birthday festival was drawing near too, so there was much to do.

This would go over to *them*, and *that* would go over *there*...but goodness me, why were they sending me *these* documents? Well, I guess I was due for a trip to the Merchant Guild.

I tidied up the papers on the top of my desk. Goodness, it does seem like my workload has been increasing of late. Perhaps that's what you get when you put so much effort into your job, day after day.

Since I found a good stopping place for my work, I stretched my back to loosen up the tension. Hmm... I thought they'd be here now. Any second, right?

Ah, that's what I'd been expecting for the last few days. My husband Cliff and my daughter Noa were coming to the capital soon. I hadn't seen them in so long, and I couldn't hold back my excitement. But I had yet to hear about their arrival.

I had ordered the capital's gate guards to immediately notify me upon Cliff's arrival so I could see them right away. Is that abusing my power? Oh, absolutely.

But can my undying love for my husband and child be stopped? Never.

Oh well.

I started looking over a new document—while working, naturally—when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" I answered without taking my eyes off the document.

“My, how unusual for you to be working.”

I raised my head at the unexpected voice—my visitor was the highest-ranking person in the country, His Majesty, in the flesh.

“How rude, your highness!” I said. “I am *always* hard at work.”

“Oh, yes, I’m sure. That’s why officials are always looking high and low for you throughout the castle.”

“It’s my way of teaching them that they need to learn how to do the work themselves.”

“So I see. But recently, you’ve actually been found in your office, of all places.”

“That’s because of a certain *someone’s* birthday festival, which has me quite busy.” I tried goading the king a little. It was his fault I was so busy, after all.

“Yes, I’m sure. We really didn’t need to go out of the way to hold such a celebration, you know,” he agreed.

I suppose he hadn’t noticed my overt sarcasm. “Did you really go so far out of your way just to check if I was working, Your Majesty?”

“Of course not.” The king sat down in a guest chair and produced a small cask and cups from his item bag. In other words, he had come here to play hooky and avoid his *own* tasks.

“You can stay here for a short while,” I said, “but please do head back soon.”

“My, how diligent you are. That’s not like you at all.” The king filled the cups with his favorite tea for breaks and drank. Even though he could have a maid brew the tea, he always prepared it himself when he slipped away.

“My husband and daughter will be coming to the capital before long,” I explained. “I’d like to make sure I have time for them when they do.”

“That’s why you’ve been acting so diligent of late?”

“Your Majesty, are you *sure* you should be slipping away from your duties like this?”

“What’s so wrong with being away for a short while? Even if I’m away, they

still have Zang.”

Zang was the king’s most trusted advisor. The belabored man was always cleaning up after the king, but he was still one of the few people who could give His Majesty his most honest opinions.

“You need to be more prudent about how all these breaks you’re taking,” I warned. “Zang’s going to collapse from exhaustion one of these days.” Zang’s workload was already ridiculous as it was. But I suppose that also showed how much the king trusted him since he had been given such weighty work to tend to.

“Zang likes to work,” said the king. “It’s fine! Then again, if you’re so concerned, how about I shift some of that work onto you?”

How absurd! I was already busy enough with a certain king’s birthday. I wouldn’t know what to do if I had even more to deal with.

“Err, I must be mistaken,” I said. “Zang enjoys the work, so you shouldn’t have any cause for worry.”

“You’re too much, Ellelaura.”

The king looked peeved to hear me choose myself over Zang. It wasn’t like I didn’t feel bad for the guy, but I needed someone to handle the work so I could get some peace and quiet. While I kept up conversation with the king, I looked over the schedule for the soldiers patrolling the capital when there was another knock at the door. *That* seemed to startle His Majesty.

“If it’s someone searching for me, say I’m not here,” he said softly to me and moved to the adjacent room. Of course, if it was someone looking for the king, I intended to hand him over without any hesitation. I faced the door and gave the permission to enter.

“Pardon me.” An official entered.

“What is it?” I asked.

“We’ve received word from the capital gate. Miss Noir has arrived at the capital.”

“Are you sure?!“ They were finally here. “Thank you, you are dismissed,” I

said, sending the official away. I signed the document I had in progress and reached for the next one; there were still quite a few that I needed to review before the end of the day.

“You can go home for the day.” The king came back from the other room. “I’ll finish up in your stead.” The king picked up the reports on the desk and continued, “Your daughter is here. Feel free to go home early.”

“My, my,” I mused, “do you suppose I should buy a lottery ticket today too?” The king had run out of work and wanted to take up my work out of the goodness of his heart? That kind of thing never happened. Perhaps today was a good day for some high stakes gambling.

“Go on before I change my mind. Besides, I’m sure if I didn’t let you go early, you’d spend the whole time complaining about how long it’s been since you’ve seen your daughter.”

“I’ll take you up on that,” I said.

“Yes, please do.”

I thanked the king, left the office, and started off at a quick jog. I was looking forward to seeing my daughter so much, I was practically humming with joy. I nearly brushed past a carriage on the way home. That was a close call.

Right when I got to a point where I could make out my house, I saw my beloved little girl standing there out front. There was something black next to her, but I could think about that later—today, I only had eyes for my dear daughter.

“Nooooaaa!” I gave her a firm hug. It had been so long. She had grown a little. Noa gave me a surprised look—ah, even her surprise is cute!

After I’d gotten enough hug time with my little girl, I looked for my husband. But...Cliff wasn’t here. In his place, I spied an interesting-looking girl. Her outfit was rather adorable, actually. And beside her was another girl, one that looked about as old as Noa. Who were they?

Noa told me she had come ahead of Cliff because he had unfinished work. I asked about the odd girl and was told that...she was a bear? The girl next to my Noa did indeed seem to be dressed as a bear, but I’d never seen her before in

my life.

But apparently this girl had protected Noa on the way to the capital. She was an adventurer, then...even though she was smaller than my older daughter, Shia. This girl dressed as a bear was named Yuna, and the other one was Fina.

For the time being, we headed inside—I wanted to hear everything. I led them to a room and the bear girl produced a large box and a letter that Cliff had entrusted her with from her bear glove. The bear glove was an item bag, was it? Interesting.

First, I looked over the letter. Cliff said that he would be coming late due to work, that the box contained something to present to the king, and that he wanted me to present it if he ended up not getting here in time.

In addition to those business items, there was a *lot* written about the bear girl. Some of the stuff was interesting, others sounded like jokes, and there were parts got me tilting my head or even left my mouth hanging open from shock. Most notably, Cliff wrote that despite her cute appearance, the bear girl was an excellent adventurer.

As I read the letter, I couldn't help but glance over and over again at the bear girl sitting before me. I knew better than anyone that Cliff was not the kind of person who would write something like this as a joke...which meant that everything in the letter was completely true.

I closed the letter and first checked the goblin king sword that was to be presented to His Majesty. Apparently, goblin kings rarely had swords so fine. In the hands of a goblin king, the blade was supposed to be dreadfully sinister, but the sword looked quite pretty on its own. Apparently, Cliff had gotten the sword from the girl in front of me.

But how could a girl like this do something so incredible? All I could see was an odd girl who dressed as a cute bear.

If it were not for Cliff's letter, I might have laughed at her.

After that, Noa told me all about their adventures coming to the capital. The story was bewildering—unbelievable, even. As Noa told the story, the time drew near for Shia to come home from the academy.

When I told Yuna about Shia arriving, she made a strange face. She had to have been thinking something odd.

Curious, I asked her what was on her mind. She replied that she didn't think someone as beautiful, lovely, and young as me could have a daughter who was fifteen years old.

Ah, flattery will get you everywhere!

I asked her how old I looked, and she said twenty-five *glorious* years old. Why, who wouldn't adore such an honest and charming girl?

After all of that, Shia finally had arrived home. I wondered whether seeing Yuna gave her just as much of a shock as I had gotten.

Ha ha ha! At any rate, Cliff had sent some truly adorable girls over my way.

Chapter 9:

Encounter with the Bear

Shia's Chronicles

MY SISTER WAS SUPPOSED to be coming to the capital soon. I hadn't seen her for a long time, so I was really looking forward to her arrival.

"You seem pretty happy, Shia," said a girl in my class. "What's up?"

"My sister is finally coming to the capital. I haven't seen her in ages."

"Ah, yep, that's something to look forward to. Is that why you've been hurrying home recently?"

"Oh, you noticed?"

"These last few days I was going to ask if you wanted to walk home together," she said, smiling, "but you were out of the classroom before I could get a word out."

She'd noticed all that? I felt embarrassed. "Goodness, I'm sorry."

"Nah, don't worry yourself over that," she said. "I know how much you care about your sister and what a nice person you are."

"We could go home together today, if you'd like."

"Ha ha ha! You needn't force yourself to come with me. I'll ask you again once your sister gets here."

"I'm sorry," I apologized again and she left with a smile. Still, I hurried home again—she was being considerate, so it'd be silly not to accept that.

Our maid, Surilina, greeted me when I got home.

I asked her the same question I asked every day. "Is there any news of Noa?"

"Yes, she arrived just a short time ago. She's in the parlor."

And I was off, dashing to the parlor and throwing the door open without

knocking.

“I’m back, Mother! Is Noa really here?!”

Noa was sitting on the sofa. She seemed to be doing just fine.

“Shia, you have *guests* present,” Mother cautioned me as I hugged Noa.

“Oh, pardon me. Please excuse my rudeness. Wait, you mean that *bear* is here?!”

When I looked closely (not that I *had* to look very closely), I could see that a girl dressed as a bear was sitting next to Noa. I didn’t know what to make of her outfit, though. I mean, I’d never seen anyone dressed in such a way in my entire life.

Her name was Yuna. According to my mother, she was an adventurer and had escorted Noa from Crimonia to the capital, but...there was no way could I believe something like that.

Since I wasn’t having any of it, Mother proposed a match between me and the bear girl, Yuna. I accepted that proposal. I was the strongest girl in my age group, after all, and there was no way I’d lose to this strange bear girl.

Promptly, she demolished me.

At first, I’d underestimated her. She’d slipped right past my defenses, knocked away my sword, and held her own blade right in front of my face. I asked for a rematch, and Yuna readily accepted my proposal.

This time, I’d take her seriously: I’d see her as a proper opponent.

“Let’s do this one more time, please...!” I said, grasping my wooden sword tightly to stop from being disarmed.

But the result was exactly the same. We fought match after match, but Yuna always dodged my sword and I couldn’t parry her blows. She was as fast as lightning: I couldn’t keep track of her. She closed the distance in a flash and struck me.

She was strong, fast, and powerful...but *how*? As strong as I was within the

confines of the academy, I was helpless against her. I couldn't win with swords, so I asked if I could use magic. If this was real combat, I'd use magic and not just a sword. Magic was another aspect of my abilities, after all. Yuna gave me permission to use spells, and we went at it again.

The moment the match started, I launched a volley of fire magic at Yuna. I knew that she would dodge it, so I started attacking with my sword right after... but she could read me like a book and easily dodged my attack. I didn't give up and lunged with my magic and my sword. Yuna was strong...*too* strong.

She struck me in the stomach. I fell to my knees and my mother declared an end to the match. I could still fight, but Mother was giving me a sharp look now.

"That's enough."

I accepted my defeat without another word. So, Yuna really was stronger than me. I didn't think I'd lose to a girl who was so much younger, except...

"I'm fifteen," she told me.

"Wh-what?" I'd figured she was younger than me, given how short she was, but I guess we were the same age after all.

After that, I learned so much stuff about Yuna. She'd slain goblins, orcs, and tigerwolves—I could barely believe it! I might've laughed if I'd heard all this before our match, but I was convinced now. If it was all true, I'd never be able to beat her. She was already great with a sword, but apparently she could use magic too. I couldn't even imagine how strong she was.

She had bear summons too, which sounded terrifying. But Noa said they were cute, soft to the touch, and that she had slept on their backs a number of times. Again, I could barely believe it...but when I saw my sister's face, I knew she wasn't lying.

I hoped she'd show me the summons another time. I was looking forward to it, but...honestly, I was also a bit scared as well.

"Are you not going home early today?" My classmate came over to my desk.

“Ah, my sister arrived yesterday.”

“Oh, how wonderful! In that case, wouldn’t you want to go home early?”

“I was hoping we could walk home together today. I promised, didn’t I?”

“That makes me so happy, but are you sure?”

“Of course I am.” We stopped for some tea at a café near the academy and then headed home.

“What is your younger sister like, Shia?”

“Hmm... She looks like our mother. I suppose she’s a bit of a free spirit. She pries into everything when she feels like it and can have fun with anything.”

Other people told me Noa was like Mother as well. I was the more serious one, apparently, and much more like my father. I didn’t think of myself as a very serious person, but I guess that’s how people saw me.

“She seems full of energy.”

“Too much energy,” I replied.

“Well, you’re finally seeing your sister again. Why are you sighing so much? You’ve been sighing all day. Honestly, I kind of thought your sister had canceled on you or something.”

Jeez, she was quite observant. “Goodness, was I really sighing that often? How embarrassing...”

“Yep, every time I looked at you.”

I’d sighed every time I thought about yesterday. That bear girl was just so powerful...

“So why are you sighing?” she pressed. “Is it because of your little sister?”

I shook my head. “The adventurer that escorted my sister to the capital is a bit much to handle.”

“Ah, unpleasant?”

“No, I guess she’s nice enough.”

“*She* is? So she’s a girl then?”

“Yes, and an adventurer the same age as me.”

“But it’s not too rare to see a fifteen-year-old adventurer, you know.”

“I suppose, but *she*’s unusually strong. I was so upset that such an odd girl had guarded my little sister, I challenged her to a match. But then I was utterly defeated even though she was going easy on me.”

“What? *You*? Defeated?” She gave me a dubious look.

“Yep. Absolutely decimated. She dodged my attacks so easily and I couldn’t defend against a single hit. Even when I used magic, it didn’t make a difference. I never realized I was so weak... Just thinking about it, I can’t help but sigh...”

“I don’t believe it. I don’t think anyone could beat you just like that.”

“I can’t talk about it in detail, but...the more I learned about her past, the more I realized how much stronger she was than me.”

“Well, they’re always talking about the difference between practice and genuine experience.”

“I suppose so, but what kind of experience did she have to make her so amazingly strong?”

“Was she really that powerful?”

“I think she’s probably stronger than our teacher.”

“Whoa...!”

“Not that I think our teacher is weak or anything, mind you. It’s just I couldn’t even *tell* how strong she really was. I couldn’t see any way for me to win. If I worked hard for several more years, I could see me having an even match with our teacher, but with *her*? I don’t think that’s even possible. And even after all that, I got the sense that she was still hiding how strong she really was.”

She had been holding back with her sword, and she hadn’t used magic even after I had. But she could’ve if she wanted to... She could’ve even summoned beasts. There was no telling how much more powerful than me she was.

“I’d like to meet this adventurer,” my friend said.

“It would be better not to meet her. I have no idea what’s normal anymore.”

“When you say that, it just makes me want to meet her even more.”

We’d been talking about my little sister, but before long we were diving deep into this odd newcomer for some reason...

Chapter 10:

A Trip to the Castle with the Bear

Fina's Chronicles

OHHH... I COULDN'T believe we were going to the castle!!!

I'm not sure how it happened, but Lady ElleLaura was taking us into the castle in order to thank Yuna for letting her eat pizza. But was a commoner like me really allowed inside there? I asked Lady ElleLaura about it.

"It's not a problem," she said. "If anyone says anything to you, I'll give them a piece of my mind." Well, that just frightened me even more...

We headed off to the castle for the tour. This would have been unimaginable a month ago. I never thought I'd come to the capital, let alone inside the castle. Everything had changed after I met Yuna. This was all happening thanks to her.

While I was looking at Yuna, she smiled at me. "What's up?"

"Oh, nothing," I replied. She really was such a strange person...

We arrived at the castle and Lady ElleLaura guided us to where guards were standing watch. The guards had been staring at us suspiciously for a while now. Did they think I looked strange? I knew it; they knew I was a lowly commoner.

As we got closer, I noticed they weren't looking at me, but were actually looking at Lady ElleLaura and Yuna. The guards asked Lady ElleLaura about us and seemed slightly suspicious.

Lady ElleLaura's tone immediately changed. "These are *my* guests," she said firmly. "I thought I would show them around the inside of the castle. Will this be a problem?"

"No, not at all. It's just my job to check on the comings and goings of everyone. Please, go right ahead." The guards took a step back and bowed before opening the entrance for us. Lady ElleLaura sure was amazing.

I gave a small nod to the guards and one said—to me, of all people!— “Please, go on ahead.”

I was nervous just passing by the guards, so I unconsciously grabbed Yuna’s bear hand. Yuna noticed but she didn’t say anything.

She just smiled.

When we got into the castle, it was like the whole building really opened up. There was so much that we couldn’t see from outside. It was really big and amazingly beautiful. It was splendid, and I was totally satisfied with all the castle I’d gotten today, thank you very much.

But Lady Ellelaura and Yuna still kept walking through the castle anyway, and all sorts of people were looking our way. They seemed to be looking at Lady Ellelaura and Yuna, but I felt like they were looking at me because I was with them. It was very stressful...very stressful indeed.

I heard there were many nobles working in the castle, just like Lady Ellelaura. It was scary to think what would happen if I did anything rude in their presence. With one slip-up, my family could get thrown out of our home. Even though I was getting a tour of the castle and was supposed to be enjoying it, I couldn’t let my guard down. Still, I probably would never be able to come inside the castle again, so I made sure to also soak it all in to have a nice story to bring back for Shuri.

The inside of a castle was pretty, just like something from a fairy tale. There were flowers blooming all over. The pillars and floors were spotless and shining. It was probably all so hard to keep clean.

We were taken to where soldiers were fighting. Lady Noir did say there was a place where soldiers and knights trained, so apparently we were going to see them in action.

The soldiers were clashing with their swords. It was a bit scary hearing them yell and listening to their swords clang, but Lady Ellelaura and Yuna watched very calmly. I guess they weren’t scared at all.

While we were watching them practice, Lady Ellelaura asked Yuna if she would like to try training with the soldiers. Did she really want Yuna to fight the people here? The soldiers looked very strong, but I couldn't imagine a world where Yuna didn't beat them. How odd.

But Yuna said no. Lady Ellelaura seemed disappointed. I was a little disappointed too, but it wouldn't be good if anyone got injured in the fight.

After Yuna said no, we went elsewhere. When we left the training grounds, a little girl grabbed onto Yuna. She was very cute. She looked like she was around four or five years old and was wearing colorful and beautiful clothes. She didn't look like anyone else we'd met in the castle either.

"Why if it isn't Lady Flora!" said Lady Ellelaura. "What are you doing here?"

Wait, did she call this little girl a *lady*? Did that mean she had a very high status? Maybe she was a high-ranking child of nobles. I could think of another possibility, but it was so scary I couldn't bring myself to consider it, not even for a second. They talked for a little longer, and then Lady Ellelaura said exactly what I was frightened of.

"You can't turn down an invitation from the princess, of course."

Lady Ellelaura had said *princess*. I hadn't misheard. Commoner girls *adore* princesses. The girl clinging to Yuna was a real-life *princess*. There was an actual, living, breathing *princess* right in front of me. A *princess* so close I could reach out touch her. And if I did anything disrespectful whatsoever to the princess, my entire family could be executed for my behavior.

Yuna tried to turn down the invitation, but she couldn't, so we were going to Princess Flora's room. Um... Wait, I was going too?

Princess Flora walked along, holding onto Yuna's bear hand all the while. I didn't know what to do, but then Lady Ellelaura offered me her hand. I took it and we started following. Princess Flora led us steadily deeper into the castle. We also went up a lot of stairs. Everyone we passed looked at us curiously. We must've looked pretty odd: a princess, a girl in a bear outfit, Lady Ellelaura, and a commoner were all together.

But no one said anything at all.

I didn't know how long we'd walked. I couldn't even look around right now. I couldn't look at anything at all except Princess Flora walking ahead of me. Then, finally, we arrived at her room.

I was so nervous! I had come all this way with her already, but I still wasn't sure if I was actually allowed to be inside a princess's bedroom. But no matter how I felt, the door opened and we went straight inside. A maid politely greeted us.

There were maids at Lady Noir's house too, but I could never get used to them being around. I bowed my head automatically and greeted her.

"Nice to—ah, pleased to—excuse me." I was so stressed I couldn't get words out smoothly. My whole body felt like it was full of lead...

Now that I was in the room, I had no idea what to do with myself. Yuna and Princess Flora went together to sit at a table in order to read a picture book and the maid guided me to a table a little away from them. She pulled out a seat for me.

"Th-thank you! Vwery mush!" I'd said something strange again, but the maid just pleasantly smiled at me.

"You're welcome. I will be serving tea, so please wait a moment."

I didn't really remember what happened after that. What flavor was the tea? How long were we in the room? What did I talk with the maid about? It was all a blur.

Yuna finally called my name and that was how I knew it was time to go home. Just how much time had passed?

I didn't really remember the princess's room, which was too bad... It wasn't like I'd ever get another chance to see it, after all.

STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 4



THE BEAR'S LOUNGE OPENS!

After returning to Crimonia from the capital, Yuna immediately gets to work setting up a shop where Morin can sell bread and pudding. Milaine makes arrangements too, and Yuna heads to the orphanage to ask the orphans for help with the shop. With her employees at the ready, Yuna opens her shop without any further delay. The newly opened shop is dubbed the Bear's Lounge. Although Yuna has a lot of bones to pick about those pesky bear decorations in the shop and the bear uniforms the workers wear, the shop still thrives.

THAT'S RIGHT, LET'S GO SEE THE OCEAN!

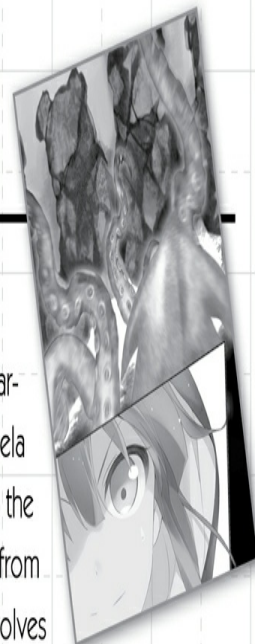
Yuna heads out to stockpile spuds and cheese for the shop but ends up slaying goblins too for some reason. She also gives the recipe for pudding to the palace chef for Princess Flora, but now there isn't much to do. With too much time on her hands, Yuna decides to go see the ocean. She gives a bear phone to a worried Fina so they can talk while they're apart, then immediately sets out over the mountains to reach a town that overlooks the sea. On the way, Yuna saves a married couple, Damon and Yuura, who are in a precarious situation on the snowy mountain peak. Then, all three arrive safely at the town of Mileela, where the married couple resides.

EVIL DEEDS EXPOSED!

Mileela is struggling due to a kraken appearance in the sea. Because Yuna knows Mileela has a food shortage, she heads straight to the adventurers' guild. Despite skepticism from guild master Atola, Yuna pulls a ton of wolves from her bear storage to save the town...but someone isn't happy about that. The Merchant Guild's master, Droi, has been taking advantage of the hardships in Mileela from the shadows, scheming to rake in the dough while others suffer. Yuna turns the tables on Droi's underlings when they come to attack her, and she squashes the main bandits. With that, Droi's evil deeds are exposed.

BECAUSE I WANT THAT DELICIOUS FOOD!

Now that Droi's evil deeds have been brought to light, there's still other problems as the kraken has done its damage. Looks like Mileela's troubles are far from over. But things change when Yuna has a run in with rice, soy sauce, and miso at the inn where she's staying. Yuna realizes the kraken is preventing more rice from being imported, and bravely resolves to slay the beast. She traps the kraken in a wall of massive bear statues with earth magic, then boils it alive using fire bears. With Yuna's spectacular effort, peaceful days finally return to the town of Mileela.



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Chapter 11:

Karin Working in the Crimonia Shop

MY MOM AND I took Miss Yuna, the girl dressed as a bear, for her word and left our familiar home at the capital to open a bakery in Crimonia. I was a bit anxious about going to an unfamiliar town, but we trusted Miss Yuna—after all, she'd even provided the fare for the stagecoach to Crimonia. It was such a comfortable ride too; my bottom didn't get sore at all. We were even being escorted by adventurers so we would be safe. It was probably really expensive.

Miss Yuna was constantly dressed as a bear. I mean, even her *house* was shaped like a bear. She also knew the king personally and made delicious foods like pudding and pizza. Just who in the world was she? Even when I asked her directly, she always said she was just “an adventurer.”

I asked Fina about Miss Yuna's appearance, but—as expected—even she didn't know. What she did say, though, was that Miss Yuna was very kind and had saved her life.

The carriage bounced along the road for a few days before finally arriving at Crimonia. I was tired, of course, but we had to meet with Yuna. If I remembered right, she'd told us to go to the orphanage once we arrived...

I asked the guard at the gate where the orphanage was—he told us it was on the outskirts of town. Once we arrived, we were greeted by the headmistress and Miss Tiermina, who worked there. It seemed Yuna that had let them know we were coming. I was glad to find them expecting us. I don't know *what* I would've done if, after the long journey, they didn't know who we were.

I was also told that Miss Tiermina was Fina's mother, which was nice to hear—she seemed very kind.

When I asked where Miss Yuna herself was, they said they would bring her over. Miss Tiermina had her other daughter, Shuri, run to get her. Gosh, she was just as adorable as Fina!

We talked with Miss Tiermina and the headmistress while waiting for Miss Yuna.

“So who *is* Miss Yuna really?” I asked.

Tiermina and the headmistress exchanged looks.

“It’s better if you don’t think too deeply about Yuna,” said Miss Tiermina, and the headmistress nodded. “It’s exhausting, trying to figure her out—futile, really. That being said, there’s one thing I’m sure of. Yuna isn’t a bad kid.”

“Uh-huh...” So Miss Tiermina and the headmistress had stopped trying to learn more about Miss Yuna. But from the look on their faces, I could tell that Yuna really wasn’t a bad person at all.

As we were talking with Miss Tiermina, Miss Yuna arrived at the orphanage. I was so relieved to see her and her bear clothes. Like all the times before, Yuna was dressed up as a bear. I guess it really was her everyday outfit.

Considerate as always, Miss Yuna saw how fatigued we were from the trip and decided that we should rest today. I was relieved to hear it—we were exhausted, after all, even though the stagecoach was so nice. Then Miss Yuna said she’d guide Mom and me to where we’d stay. Miss Yuna was giving us a place to live? She really was looking after us.

“Miss Yuna, what is this?” She’d brought us to a small mansion.

“This is the shop where you’ll both live and work.”

This was the shop? Even if it was small for a mansion, it was still a *mansion*. We headed inside to find beautiful tables and chairs set up to serve guests on the first floor. Mom and I were going to live on the second floor.

After that, Miss Yuna just gave us a quick explanation of things and headed home, leaving Mom and me in the mansion. Just who was Miss Yuna, *really*?

“Mom?”

“I think we might have gotten ourselves in a very strange situation with this

girl.”

I could only agree. What did Miss Yuna *really* intend to have us do? Did she just want us to bake bread?

Since Miss Yuna had gone home and left us behind, we explored the inside of the shop. We headed to the kitchen first.

“Mom, this kitchen is huge!” It had three entire stone ovens. “These ovens are new too. And all of the ingredients for bread are here.”

The cold storage and pantry were stocked with wheat flour and all the necessary ingredients for bread, so we could bake at any time. I guess she really was making this an actual shop.

My mother took out some wheat and started prepping to make bread. Even though she must’ve been tired from traveling from the capital, she seemed so happy that I couldn’t bear to stop her. I ended up lending her a hand.

Once we were done, we decided to relax in the real big bath and flopped into soft beds. I hadn’t thought I’d be able to feel at home enough to sleep in these spacious rooms, but I must’ve been too tired not to. As soon as I went under the covers, I fell right asleep.

The next day, I woke up and baked more with my mom.

“These are such nice ovens,” she said, but...was it okay for us to be doing all this? She hadn’t asked Miss Yuna for permission to use them yet. Well, I suppose it was fine. I wanted some breakfast, after all.

In the middle of our baking, Miss Yuna brought along some kids. She wasn’t angry at all that we’d baked bread on our own. In fact, she seemed more shocked at herself for eating breakfast already—she’d wanted to save room for some of Mom’s bread, apparently. That made me a little happy, at least.

After that, she introduced the kids, who were apparently going to be working at the shop. Miss Yuna explained how we’d would run things. Before opening, everyone would bake bread. After the shop opened, Mother would take over baking and I would run the store. As for managing the money, Miss Yuna

wanted us to sort that out ourselves.

Since I'd teach the kids how to bake the bread, I started with the most important part of baking: proper sanitation. First and foremost, we had to wash our hands and make sure everything was clean. Mom and Dad drilled that step into me when I was little.

I also had to teach the kids how to serve the guests and handle money.

"Welcome!" I said, demonstrating the proper tone and decorum for greeting guests.

"Welcome!" the kids repeated.

"Thank you very much," I said.

"Thank you very much," they repeated.

After that, I taught them how to take orders and payments. For practice, I took on the role of a customer. I'd watched Mom and Dad since I was small so I knew how to go about it, but the kids were starting from nothing. It was important not to get upset with them if they messed up—I just had to explain what to do. Everyone is a beginner at some point, after all. When they finally got the hang of something, I praised them. It was the same way my parents had taught me.

"Yeah, that's it!" I said and gave them some headpats—they really seemed to like that. I'd been happy when my parents had praised me too.

"Karin," said one of the kids, "don't we have to wait for a bit when doing pizza?"

"Unlike bread, we have to bake pizzas on the spot, so it takes a little bit longer. That's why you have to be extra-sure to memorize who ordered what. It'd be a mess if you gave it to the wrong person, after all."

"Got it," one of the kids said. They were listening to me very closely, and they were responsive too.

"The headmistress and Liz made sure to raise those kids well," Mom pointed out.

Yeah... Even when the headmistress and Liz lost their funding, they never abandoned the kids. Instead, they worked as hard as they could for the orphans in their care. Then, just like she had for me and Mom, Yuna came to their rescue.

That's why the kids could smile. The kids adored Yuna and got positively giddy with excitement whenever she showed up. When Yuna patted their heads, the kids smiled even brighter.

I thought I'd encountered misfortune when my dad had died, but these kids didn't have any parents at all and they were still working so hard at such a young age. When I was that little, I'd been so reluctant, even when I helped out.

"Karin, is this good?" One of the kids asked me while kneading some dough with her tiny hands.

I felt the dough to check. "A little bit more."

"Okay." She started to knead with her small hands again.

I never thought I'd be teaching others how to make bread like this.

The kids made a ton of practice loaves of bread. I was worried about wasting the ingredients, but they took the bread back to the orphanage, so it was fine in the end. The next day, the kids happily reported that all the other orphans had said it was delicious.

I knew that special feeling. I was happier than anything when someone told me my bread was delicious. It made all the effort I put into baking worth it. That was why I'd been so happy when Miss Yuna had told me our bread was good. When our bread got trampled on and Miss Yuna got angry about it...that was nice too. Really, I was just grateful to Miss Yuna in general.

There was a lot to teach the kids before the shop opened. I had to do my best to show them the ropes.

Chapter 12:

Working for the Bear

Tiermina's Chronicles

I'M TIERMINA, mother of two. When I was on the brink of death from my illness, I was saved by a mysterious girl dressed like a bear. Now, I help her with some of her jobs.

My main job is managing the kokkeko eggs and our dealings with the Merchant Guild. I was counting the eggs the orphans had collected today, occasionally wondering whether just counting and selling eggs wholesale to the Merchant Guild was worth my wages. I do other work, of course, but this was my main duty.

"There's more than usual today," I noted to myself. Egg production was steadily increasing. At this rate, we'd be able to save some for the orphans to eat.

Some eggs were cracked, and we also often had leftovers that the orphanage would end up using. Yuna said that eggs were nutritious, so she'd asked me to make sure the orphans got to have some.

A crack didn't change the fact that the eggs were valuable. Yuna didn't care about the bottom line though and would readily give those to the orphans anyway. I was allowed to bring some home too, of course, though I felt conflicted about that.

After I set aside the eggs for the Merchant Guild, a guild staff member came at the usual time to pick them up from me. Now the only thing left for today was my visit to the headmistress to ask if she needed anything. The headmistress was rather self-conscious, so she often wouldn't tell me that she needed anything at all unless I pressed her on the matter. Just recently, she'd started outright telling me about what she wanted, but she was still so reluctant.

Baby steps, I suppose.

Yuna was dedicated to making sure that, at the bare minimum, the orphans had food and shelter. The headmistress and Liz put themselves second when it came to getting the children food. I understood how they felt, but the worst problem we could have would be if either of them got sick and couldn't take care of the kids. That's why I always made sure they had more food than they needed.

"Anything leftover becomes feed for the birds," I always said, "so please eat your fill!" I suppose old habits die hard, especially since they'd been living this way for years. That's why I made sure to check on their groceries personally.

"I'll get another order of vegetables in," I said.

"Thank you for everything," said Yuna.

"It's part of my job. Besides, the kids are working for us, so they have a right to these things."

That was how Yuna always put it, at least, though this wasn't usually the case. Child labor wasn't taken seriously here, and it wasn't highly paid either. Still, Yuna didn't seem to care. The kids knew how lucky they were, I think, and so they worked earnestly to live up to Yuna's hopes.

All the while, the kokkeko numbers were increasing steadily, as was the number of eggs we were selling to the Merchant Guild.

Yuna and my daughter Fina returned from the capital safe and sound. Both Fina and my husband Gentz had told me how strong Yuna was as an adventurer, but I found it hard to believe that this adorable little girl could battle so well.

Fina talked happily about the capital as Shuri listened enviously. And in the middle of the conversation, Yuna dropped unbelievable news; she somehow hired bakers at the capital and was having them come to Crimonia, all to open a shop that would sell bread and pudding. Moreover, she wanted *me* to manage

the money and ingredients. Since she wanted the bakers to devote themselves to baking, she was charging me with managing the shop itself.

People don't entrust money matters to someone unless they truly have the utmost faith in that person. Most people were afraid of embezzlement and managed financial things themselves or entrusted family members with those matters. But here Yuna was, casually asking me to handle her affairs. It was just like she'd been when she'd asked me to manage the eggs.

And I was already handling a lot of money just by selling those. I even controlled the funds that the orphanage used to buy their groceries. Though I was glad Yuna had so much faith in me, I wish she'd be more cautious.

Still, a cute bear girl needed my help, and I wasn't about to rock her faith in me. I accepted.

I finished work and went home. My daughter had been at the capital though, so I wanted to get a little more information. "Fina, could you tell me what happened? Even just the gist is fine."

"There was a bakery in the capital that made yummy bread," she began. "Then some bad people attacked it and Yuna saved them."

As I listened to the story, I realized Yuna had saved the mother and daughter at the bakery just like she had saved my family. What else could I expect though, from a good person like her? Her kindness had saved us. It was the reason why we were here now.

I wanted to live up to Yuna's expectations. That's why I planned to not only manage my current workload, but get things done in the shop too. But Yuna moved a lot more quickly than I'd expected.

I thought we would decide on things once Morin and her daughter were in Crimonia, but Yuna consulted with Milaine at once and quickly bought a shop—or at least she *said* it was to be a shop, but it was more of a mansion. A relatively small one, sure, but I could still barely believe it.

I had imagined something smaller for the bakery: perhaps something that a family could manage, but nope. This was definitely, absolutely, 100 percent a small mansion. Still, Yuna had already bought it, so there was no use saying anything more on the subject.

After that, we discussed the inside of the shop, but all the while Yuna kept repeating those words: “I was hoping to leave it all to you, Tiermina.”

She told me to talk with Milaine about the tables and chairs and such that we’d need for the shop. I was to make those decisions, but I couldn’t just do that. What did Yuna even want? And what if she changed her mind after I made a call?

“How many tables should we have?” I asked.

“In this area we’ll have family and large-party seating. Over here, I was thinking tables that seat one or two people each.”

I listened to Yuna’s plan for the shop and calculated the number of tables and chairs we’d need.

From there, I went to Milaine. If possible, I needed to find some inexpensive options to make sure we spent our available funds wisely. Milaine gave me some estimates, and we moved onto discussing the number of eggs we had—Yuna had tasked me with figuring that out too.

“What shall we do about the eggs being sold to the Merchant Guild?” I asked her.

“Yes, we do need to talk about that. Since I proposed the idea for the shop, I think that should be the priority, but could you give me more time for the guild? I want to see if we can decrease the number of eggs we’re selling to the businesses.”

“If you could.” I didn’t want to cause problems for the businesses that were expecting a regular supply of eggs from the guild.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Milaine. “It’s my fault. I’m the one who told Yuna she should open a shop.” It was true; the whole thing had become a serious

plan after she'd gotten ahold of the bakers.

Since we'd never have problems if we had more eggs, Yuna said she wanted to increase our number of kokekkos. It was easy to say, but a lot harder to do. We had to mark the eggs the hens were roosting on as a way of making sure we didn't collect them by mistake. Meanwhile, the children did their best under to follow Yuna's orders.

As we worked toward opening up the shop, Morin and her daughter arrived. I found them to be very kind, just as Fina had told me.

When I talked to them, it seemed they'd had doubts about there actually being a shop to come to. I suppose it's rather difficult to take someone proposing setting up a bakery in another town seriously. It must've been especially implausible with Yuna, considering her bear outfit.

But I guess they trusted Yuna after she'd saved them from the corrupt merchant, and I'm sure it helped that Yuna knew the king. Still, seeing that their shop was a *literal mansion* was another big surprise.

"Pardon, Tiermina, but who is Yuna really?" Morin asked.

That's what I wanted to know too. She cured me, rescued my daughter, slayed vicious monsters, and she had so much money she didn't worry about what she spent it on. I didn't have the first clue how to answer that question though.

According to Fina, she came from a faraway land. But I knew nothing else and Yuna didn't seem to want to talk about it, so I didn't question it. She was a little girl in a strange outfit, all on her own in our lands. There had to be a reason why she ended up like that, but everyone has things they don't want to talk about. Until Yuna opened up, I wouldn't question her. And so I had only one answer for Morin: "She is a very kind and gracious bear."

"Well, I suppose you're right." We exchanged smiles.

There was still much to do. We definitely had our work cut out for us to prep for the grand opening.

Chapter 13:

The Bear Tests a New Skill

I RETURNED FROM the king's birthday celebration and things had started settling down in Crimonia. Morin's shop was doing well, so I didn't have any reason to butt in about anything. The whole operation was running smoothly, with Morin and Tiermina at its center. Nowadays, all I could do was check in.

Today was their weekly break day. Since there was nothing happening at the shop, I didn't have any reason to head over there.

For the first time in a while, I was bored. So there I was, just lying in bed trying to figure out what to do today...and then I remembered that I'd picked up two new skills from slaying monsters at the capital. The first new skill I'd learned was the bear phone—it gave me the ability to make a magic item that could be used to talk with people far away. Think of a walkie-talkie, or a smartphone even, just without the smarts.

I checked the details of the skill again:

Bear Phone

Can have long-distance conversations with others.

Phone persists until caster dispels it. Physically indestructible.

Can call people a bear phone is given to by picturing the person.

Incoming call is signaled by a bear's cry. By using mana to turn the phone on or off, user can make calls.

I tried making a bear phone, and a small device—one that looked like a chibified version of Kumayuru and Kumakyu—appeared in my hand. So this was a bear phone? It basically *was* a walkie-talkie, then, though it sure did look like a figure of my bears.

I couldn't really use just one on its own, so I made another. I ended up with one tiny bear figure in each of my hands. Hmm, maybe they looked like my bears because this was one of my bear skills? Still, they sure were cute.

If they functioned like walkie-talkies and cell phones, though, you needed someone to actually call for them to be useful. Without two endpoints and someone to communicate with who wanted to talk with you, or someone who had an emergency and needed to talk, they'd be worthless.

Who would I even use a bear phone with? Nobody else had one. Who would I even call?

Besides, I didn't even know if this world *had* things communication devices like this, so it wasn't like I could just hand the bear phones out to anybody. If I did give one out, it'd need to be someone I really trusted, and there was only one person who fit the bill—the same person I'd shared my bear gate with.

Fina.

But I saw Fina almost every day and I could go see her anytime I wanted. If there was an emergency, I could just talk to her in person. With nobody to give the phones to, the things were useless. I quietly put my shiny new bear phones away.

The other skill was bear-summon cubification. I was stumped when I saw this skill's description. Wait, *cubification*? Not *gigantification* or even *bigification*? I mean, when would I ever want my bears to turn into cubs?

To test it out, I summoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu at their normal sizes. They came up to me, looking curious about why I'd called them. I petted them, and they seemed to enjoy that.

Then I tried invoking the cubification skill. My bears rapidly shrunk until they were about as big as baby bears I'd seen on television. Oh no: that's super adorable.

I spread my arms out and they trundled over to me so I could give them a great big bear hug. They were wagging their itty-bitty tails like excited puppies! They were already adorable at their normal size, but this fun-size version was cute as heck.

I looked them over again. What was the use case for cubification, exactly? Would it ever actually come in handy? I could find all kinds of ways to use a skill that made them giant. They could fight giant monsters or give a lift to a ton more people when we traveled, for example.

But bear *cubs*? Shrinking them also shrank their offensive and defensive abilities. I couldn't ride them anymore like this, so it wasn't useful for travel. Yeah, I couldn't think of any advantages that this could actually give me.

The kinda dubious advantages things I could think of were these: I could summon them in tight spaces, I could hold them easily, I could carry them, and they were cute as buttons. Yeah, that was about it. I picked up Kumayuru and realized they kind of looked like stuffed animals. Maybe I could walk around town with them like this?

But there wasn't anything they could do in a fight. How in the world was this useful?

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, can you do anything now that you're small?" I asked them directly even though I didn't think they'd have an answer.

They both crooned at me and tilted their heads to the side. Right, that was exactly what I was expecting. I checked the skill description on this one too.

Summons, Beast Cubification

The bear summons can be transformed into bear cubs.

That was all that was written there. Well, maybe I'd come up with something if I hung out with them in their cub forms? I decided to keep them like this for the rest of the day.

I got down from my bed and headed to the first floor, and it was so adorable how they started following me down. They stuck by my side when I started cooking and ate too...but that didn't mean the skill was useful.

I was petting them while sitting on the sofa when I started to feel sleepy. They were just making me too comfy, so I took them back to the bedroom, toppled onto the bed, and gave Kumayuru a big hug.

That's when I discovered a brilliant way to use my bears' cubification. Cub Kumayuru functioned as the best body pillow ever. My bear was the perfect size and soft to the touch too.

I drifted off, holding Kumayuru all the while. This was perfect, but there was one catch. I could only hug one of them, so the other one would end up sulking.

When I woke up, Kumakyu was facing away from me and pouting. I decided to hang out with Kumakyu to fix that. We hung out together until dinner and then I promised Kumakyu we'd nap together, which made my bear finally perk up a little.

With Kumayuru and Kumakyu trotting along after me, I headed to the bath to take a dip with my bears before bed. Not that they needed to bathe—even if they got dirty, they'd be clean if I just re-summoned them.

But they *liked* the bath. In a way, bathing doesn't just wash off the dirt and grime—it also cleanses and soothes the soul.

That's why I let them come bathe with me occasionally, though it was a pain to wash them when they were their normal size. It made bathing a complete

chore, but that didn't seem like it'd be an issue in their cub form.

"Come here, you two." They rushed over happily when I called them, and I headed to the bath with my bears in tow.

Once I was undressed, we headed to the washing station. I had my bears sit in front of me. I lathered up Kumayuru's black fur coat. Jeez, it was so much easier with Kumayuru in cub form. I washed Kumayuru's head, body, arms, legs...and who could forget my bear's itty-bitty wittle tail?

"All right, I'm going to rinse you off. Keep your eyes closed."

To finish up I poured warm water over my bear. I told Kumayuru to hop in the water, then called Kumakyu, who was next in line, to come sit in front of me.

"Okay, it's your turn. Just let me know if anything feels ticklish, okay?"

I lathered Kumakyu up just like Kumayuru. The dirt usually stood out on Kumakyu's white fur, but we hadn't gone out today so I didn't see any present. As I lathered Kumakyu up, they seemed to enjoy it. I made sure to finally give Kumakyu's tail a scrub, just in case, then poured hot water over my bear.

"Okay, Kumakyu, you get in the bath too."

This took a lot less time than washing them at their normal size. Maybe this was the true purpose of the cubification skill. Maybe they picked up the skill after seeing me work so hard to wash them and care for them. Honestly, now I was half-convinced that this *was* the reason. Still, I'd come up with *actual* uses for the cubification skill someday, surely.

Once my bears were clean, I washed myself and joined my bears lounging in the bath at last. It wasn't as comfortable as cuddling bears, but the bath sure was nice.

Since my bears couldn't reach the bottom, they clung to the edge of the bath. I didn't think my summons could drown, at least? Maybe I could make a smaller bath for them sometime.

After we got out of the bath, I dried them off with a towel. I could've just recalled them instead of using a towel, but they were always letting me ride

them, so I wanted to show them how grateful I was by doing it myself. After that, I gave them a blow dry with the hairdryer.

With that, the day was over. I hugged Kumakyu as promised...

“Goodnight, Kumayuru, Kumakyu.”

...and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 14:

Worrying About the Bear

Deigha's Chronicles

I'M DEIGHA. I manage an inn at the seaport of Mileela, and if ya get hungry there? Don't worry, I'm a fine cook too.

Up until about a month ago, ship passengers, adventurers, merchants and all sorts would sail their way to us, but right now? We didn't have a soul at the inn. See, a real nasty monster called a kraken appeared in our ocean. Even the coastal road didn't bring any visitors, what with the bandits that showed up there.

All we could do now was pray for the kraken to disappear, but there was so much more to worry about than that. We couldn't get food—no going out to sea for fishin' and no traveling to get food from neighboring hamlets. The mayor ran out on us, and what food we got is in the hands of the trade guild. And oh, they're happy to give you a crumb or two...for an arm and a leg.

If the kraken remained in our sea, we'd need to abandon the whole seaport... and no matter how hard we prayed, that kraken wasn't going away.

As I sat at the counter with nothing to do, my acquaintances Damon and Yuula came in. Something black came in behind them.

"Muscles?" she blurted.

"Bear?" I blurted back.

A girl in a bear outfit came in behind the two. Come on, what? A...bear outfit?

Apparently, the girl in the bear outfit saved Damon and Yuula when they almost died on the Elezent mountain range. I simply couldn't believe that girl crossed over such a steep mountain, but I didn't think the two of them would lie about it, either. Besides, how else were you gonna get to the seaport these days?

It really was the only route. So strange.

The two asked me to let the girl in the bear clothes stay at the inn. I didn't have any issues with that, but the only food I had was for my family. I told her I couldn't feed her. But get this—when I told her I'd cook if she gave me the ingredients, she pulled out mountains of stuff. On top of that, she told me that since she had so much to spare, my family could eat it too. Maybe this girl really was something special?

If she was going to bring the ingredients, then I'd make her a feast to die for. I cooked up something spectacular with what she had, and she said (rightly, I'd say) that it was delicious. She seemed to want to eat seafood, though. In fact, that's why she crossed the mountain! I wanted to feed her some, but the kraken made that slightly difficult. Guess I'd try asking old man Kuro.

The next morning, the girl said she'd head to the adventurers' guild and left the inn. Before long, Yuula came in to see her.

"That little miss? She's headed to the adventurers' guild." Yuula promised to show the girl around town, she said, but looks like the little scamp ran out on her own. "You want to wait here?" I offered.

"No, I'll head over to the adventurers' guild. I might be able to catch her there."

"If she comes back, I'll let her know you came by."

"If you could."

I decided to split the food I'd gotten from her with my friends and neighbors. You gotta help each other when things get rough like this, after all. Me and my daughter Anz butchered the wolf bodies, and my wife and son took it to the neighbors.

"Dad, did you really get all this food for free?" Anz asked me as we worked. And yeah, it shocked me too. It wasn't just wolves, but also vegetables and flour and all kinds of other stuff. It was mostly wolves, the girl said, because she

mostly *had* wolves. If that's not the sign of an adventurer, I don't know what is.

While I was prepping dinner for the girl, rumors of still more food being distributed filtered in. The adventurers' guild passed it out to the townspeople. More wolf meat, and a whole lot of it too. Who could it be but our weird little bear girl?

Just as I was finishing up dinner prep, the bear girl came back to the inn. She'd met up with Yuula after all, and worked up a real hunger to boot. She enjoyed the dinner I made her, which was well and good, but I just wished I could do something more.

The next morning, when I started prepping the inn, I heard a groan from upstairs. Not particularly girlish, either. Strange. Worrisome? Well, when I went up to check it out, I found a bear—no, a *real* bear, and two of them—a black one and a white one. In my inn! How on earth had they gotten here, of all places?

"Is the girl bear okay? Bear girl!" I yelled through the room of her door. I was a little worried about spooking the *real* bears beside me, but they didn't seem interested. Damn it, was the girl all right?! She had to be alive...right?

For all my fretting, the girl came out of her room looking just a little groggy in a white bear outfit. The bears were her summons—my first time seeing such a thing. When I asked her about the men who were groaning under the bears, she told me she was attacked.

Unbelievable. Unforgiveable! They'd sneak into *my* inn and, on top of that, attack a little girl? Oh, I was furious.

I had my son head over to the adventurers' guild to relay the message and tied up the attackers with a rope. Tightly, with an especially rough rope. Since they weren't necessary anymore according to her, the girl made the bears just... disappear for now. Incredible.

Before long, the adventurers' guild's staff came by and took away the men. Good riddance.

As if things weren't preposterous enough, the girl then promised the guild master Atola that she was going to defeat the bandits. C'mon now, that was far too dangerous. Although Atola seemed worried at first, she still agreed.

"Miss, are you really going out to apprehend those bandits?" I asked the girl after eavesdropping on them. But she just smiled.

"C'mon man, I'll be all right. I'm an adventurer, and didn't you see my bears? Big burly bears?"

I promised her I'd make her a delicious meal once she came back. I hoped she would.

But, wonder of wonders, she did come right back. And not only that, but she *did* manage to capture the bandits. The townspeople thought that the four adventurers with her had done it at first, but nope. The bear girl herself had singlehandedly defeated them.

Who would believe something like that? I'd seen tons of adventurers in my time, strong ones and weak ones. Calling this kid adventurer strong seemed... well, if it was true, it hardly covered it.

To fulfill my promise, I decided to go all out with my meal that day. I headed to the harbor and implored old man Kuro, who watched over the ocean: "I'd like to make a meal for the bear girl who took out the bandits. Would you please let me have some fish?" I knew it was no use, but I still bowed my head. I had to try.

"Take as much as you want."

"Hold on, are you sure?" I could hardly believe it.

"Of course I'm sure, and not a soul in town would disagree. She got rid of the bandits. She even exposed the foul deeds of the trade guild. We can afford to give her fish. That's the least of what she deserves, I'd say."

Gods, though, the old man was decent. I thanked old man Kuro profusely and

took some delicious-looking fish that was caught just that morning for a nice fish dinner. Though I didn't have much left in stock, I prepared rice. It normally came in from the Land of Wa, and they knew how to prepare a good fish dish. Personally, I like rice even more than bread, and only the best would do for our little hero.

I also made a nice, hot miso soup for the girl. Fresh vegetables, the works! If I had more ingredients, I could've made it even better, but that kraken was still in the way.

When she saw the meal I made, the girl looked surprised, even as she ate it.

And she started to cry.

Had I done something wrong? Was it bad? No, she told me. It was the flavor of her home, and she cried as she savored it. She cleaned her entire plate. My cooking was good enough to make her cry? What could I even say to that? What could I do but smile and try not to cry myself?

Damn that kraken! If it weren't around, I'd be able to make an even more delicious meal for her.

The next day, my son told me that we weren't supposed to go near the sea the day after tomorrow. Why? Well, old man Kuro told him so.

Something about the way the girl was acting lately made me feel uneasy. I went to old man Kuro. "Old man Kuro, about the day after tomorrow and the sea. This hasn't got to do with the bear girl, has it?"

"Hmph." He spoke slowly. Carefully. "Now don't you go telling anyone, you hear? If you can't make that promise, I can't tell you a thing."

I agreed, but the things old man Kuro told me were absurd. The bear girl was going to fight the kraken? "Do you really believe that, old man Kuro?"

"Atola herself asked me about this, and there was nothing funny about the way she asked. And it's that same bear girl who defeated those bandits, isn't it?" He almost smiled. "Or are there other bear girls I haven't been told about?"

Hmm. But even if she could defeat bandits, that didn't mean she could defeat

a kraken. “Old man Kuro! Are you really planning to let a little girl fight the kraken by herself?!”

“Yes, yes, it’s very frightening. Now the girl claimed she could defeat the kraken, but she said that she can’t do it if we’re too close to the ocean.”

“So the bear girl is...”

“You hear me? While she fights, she asked that we not go near the ocean so none of us are put into danger.”

So the bear girl was... “I understand.”

But I didn’t have to like it. Why did the bear girl have to fight the kraken? Why couldn’t there be anyone in our little town who was strong enough to help? Made me furious, that I couldn’t do anything. That none of us could.

It was the day she’d fight the kraken. I asked her what her plans were for the day.

“I’m going for a walk. What about it?” she answered, like she was just gonna go for a nice, peaceful stroll instead of going out to slay a kraken.

Was it really all right to leave fighting the kraken to such a tiny thing? And damn it, the only thing I could do was basically make food.

“I’m going to have a meal ready for you, so you better come home.”

And a delicious one. So she better come back alive.

She ate the breakfast I made, and just...left the inn, like it really was nothing more than a walk.

I don’t know how much time passed after that. I paced the inn. My wife and daughter asked me about that, but I just couldn’t stop. I was just too worried. I didn’t need her to kill the kraken. I just wanted the kid to come back safe! Then there was a commotion at the entrance. Atola came in, and behind her trudged a bear...with the girl lying on its back.

“Miss!”

When I ran over to her, she looked exhausted. I was relieved she wasn't injured.

"I'm cool. I'm fine. Need sleep. Lemme sleep. Thanks."

At least she answered back, even if she was slumped on top of the bear. But at that, her bear squeezed itself up the stairs with the girl still slumped over.

"Atola, is she all right?! If she's hurt, I—"

"Calm down, she's fine. She just used too much magic."

"She did?" What a relief. "What about the kraken?" I wouldn't blame her if she failed. Just seeing her state, I could tell she worked hard at it.

"You knew about that?"

"Yeah, old man Kuro told me."

"I see. Yuna defeated it."

Ah, must've misheard her. I dug a little earwax outta my ear. "Repeat that?"

"Yuna defeated it?"

"She...did?"

"Yes, she defeated it for us."

"And you're serious?"

"She put her all into it too. It's no wonder she's so tired. She's the town's savior, so make sure she gets lots of rest."

Of course I would! It was my job as innkeeper to make sure that the girl got all the rest she needed, especially after all she went through. I wouldn't let anyone bother her rest.

Word spread around town about the kraken, and before long I was dealing with townspeople trying to barge into my inn and make a fuss about it. They filled the inn's entrance and overflowed outside.

"Be quiet!" I roared. "She's exhausted and asleep!"

“Dad, *you* be quiet,” my daughter warned. “Yuna is sleeping.”

“But...”

“I know, I know. But Dad, what are you going to do if you’re the one who wakes her?” She had me there.

“I understand where you’re all coming from,” I said, lowering my voice a little, “but could you let the girl rest? She fought with a kraken—you know, that *kraken* we had for a while?—and she’s tired. You would be too.”

“But, Deigha, we want to see her and thank her.”

“Yeah! She saved the town.”

I understood how they felt. I wanted to do something for her too. What was the thing that made her happiest?

“Hrm. All right, then. If any of you have leftover rice, could you lend me some? Every little bit helps. She likes the rice from the Land of Wa. I’ll make it for her when she wakes up.”

“You sure that’s enough?”

“Yeah.” I thought of that joyful smile and those tears. “That’ll make her the happiest.”

“All right.”

They finally left, but new people came in. We ended up having the same conversation.

Everyone who stopped by was all smiles. The lucky folks who actually saw the defeated kraken were excited as they talked. When I heard their stories, the fact that the girl defeated the monster started to finally feel real.

Some people even started to pray toward the inn room, which was nice, but... maybe a *little* much. I got it, though. Even my son was overwhelmed with joy: he’d be able to go out to sea again.

Before long, we had enough rice to fill a big barrel I’d prepared.

It was going to be exactly the feast a hero like her deserved, and I couldn’t wait to see her face.



ILLUSTRATION GALLERY



STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 5



LET'S DIG A TUNNEL

Deeply impressed by how delicious the food is at the inn in Mileela, Yuna thinks about inviting Deigha's daughter, Anz, to Crimonia. Anz is hesitant to come to Crimonia because the mountain range separating the towns would make it difficult to visit Mileela. However, Yuna gets the idea to create a tunnel connecting the two towns. She then carves out the tunnel in a flash.

GRAND OPENING OF THE BEAR TUNNEL!

After Yuna returns to Crimonia, she tells the feudal lord, Cliff, that the town of Mileela wants to be under Crimonia's jurisdiction...and that she's made a tunnel to get there. Although Cliff is quite fed up with Yuna's antics, he decides to go to Mileela with Milaine from the Merchant Guild. On their way, they struggle to figure out how to manage the tunnel before arriving at the adventurers' guild in Mileela to approve the town joining Crimonia. Once they hammer down how they will manage the tunnel, Yuna sets up bears by the entrances of what is soon christened the Bear Tunnel.



CONVINCING ANZ!

With permission to build a new bear house between the tunnel and the seaport, Yuna constructs a building larger than her usual houses so the orphans can stay in Mileela too. After that, she lets Anz know that a tunnel has been dug and she agrees to come to Crimonia. Yuna returns home without delay to secure land for Anz's shop and proceeds with its preparations.



A QUEST FROM ELLELAURA

Yuna is told about a truly dire honey situation, so she goes to slay the monsters at the honey tree. Once there, she saves two bears and their cubs, asks the Merchant Guild to protect them, and then goes to the capital to share honey pancakes with Princess Flora. Yuna also gifts Flora the second volume of her picture book and gives permission for the books to be reproduced. While she's there, for whatever reason, ElleLaura asks her to guard Shia during the academy's extracurricular course training. Once Yuna returns to Crimonia, she takes Fina and Shuri to Mileela and obtains a new ingredient: bamboo shoots! She then shows Deigha how to cook them.

Story:

Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear 5

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Chapter 15:

Cliff Goes to the Capital

DESPITE MY FATIGUE, I somehow encouraged myself to reach the capital.

These past several days had been so hectic that I was even sacrificing sleep for work, all of thanks to that blasted bothersome bear. She showed up at my house out of the blue to tell me she'd dug a tunnel through the Elezent mountains to connected us with Mileela!

On top of that, Mileela wanted to join my territorial jurisdiction, adding to my ongoing troubles. With Mileela so close to the sea, it would be profitable for Crimonia, so I couldn't even complain about what she'd done.

Even though I was rushing around busily at work, Yuna seemed downright bored. Just the other day, she'd come to visit my daughter Noa. Adding insult to injury, she even looked quite mellow. I never would've guessed that she was the same person who had slayed the kraken. If I didn't know about what had happened at the capital, I likely would've laughed off the very idea.

Regardless, the past few days had been busy. I'd gone to the adventurers' guild and the guild master hadn't believed me about the tunnel, so I ended up taking him there to bear witness. We determined which areas we needed monster extermination in, then set a quest for it with slightly higher reward than normal. When carriages were requested to carry the adventurers, I even had to make arrangements for *that*!

Food needed to be transported to Mileela, so the road for the tunnel was to be made as soon as possible through Milaine of the Merchant Guild. We even discussed hiring adventurers in order to guarantee safe passage.

Since I wanted to secure the road at once, I was proceeding with the monster slaying and security arrangements at the exact same time...and the costs were yet another source of my current distress.

We were still a long way off from collecting tolls from the tunnel. I needed to get to the capital to sell the kraken materials for funds, and quickly.

On top of all that, I still had my regular work to tend to.

Damn it all, there was too much for me to do!

When I arrived at the capital, I first headed to the Fochrosé estate to meet Ellelaura.

"It's been so long since we've seen one another," my wife said. "You look haggard."

"Well, I've been in a bit of a rush."

Truthfully, I would've preferred staying back in Crimonia to work, but I needed to report to the king.

"You wanted to see me that badly, didn't you?" asked Ellelaura.

"I don't have enough time to play along with your flirtations right now."

"Oh, how cold. Well, *I'm* happy to see you. Ah, and Shia will be quite delighted as well. I suppose I can credit this visit to Yuna? I'll have to give her my regards."

"That child doesn't deserve anyone's regards. She's destroyed my peace and quiet!"

"Oh, you don't really mean that."

Tsk! Ellelaura saw through me. I *was* thankful: immensely so, if I was being completely honest. Yuna had saved my life from ten thousand monsters, and she'd also been involved with the orphanage. But I wasn't about to say all that out loud, thank you very much.

"Anyway, were you able to get me an audience with the king?" I asked. "I'd like to return to Crimonia as soon as possible."

"You know, your letter was quite the surprise," she said.

I'd mailed Ellelaura a letter and asked her to set up an audience with the king, which was a much more efficient way of organizing a meeting than mailing the king directly.

"That's all settled, though," she continued. "The king told me that you'll have

an audience as soon as you arrive.”

“That’s of great aid. I’m surprised the king accepted after such a vague message.” I hadn’t mentioned the tunnel to Ellelaura. I’d merely written that I had urgent and private matters to discuss concerning Yuna and Mileela.

“That’s probably because it had to do with Yuna,” she said. “If she’s involved the king will always be willing to lend his ear.”

“Just what is that bear to the king...?”

“She’s worked her way into the royal family’s hearts directly through their stomachs.”

“Pardon?” She was...feeding the royal family? How bizarre. What in the world was that bear thinking?

The next day, I accompanied Ellelaura to the castle.

No matter how many times I visited the place, I never felt at home. I couldn’t stand formal places and I found interactions with my fellow nobles to be quite tedious. I was thankful that Ellelaura was handling all of that.

“Where will we be meeting him?” I asked.

“Since Yuna is involved, we’ll be meeting in His Majesty’s office.”

“Truly?”

I had mentioned not wanting others to know about the matter, but I’d never considered that would merit a meeting in his personal office. I felt rather frightened by the reception I was receiving. Was this also because of Yuna?

Though meeting the king face-to-face was stressful, at least Ellelaura was experienced with this type of thing.

“This is it,” she said.

I tried to prepare myself to be in the proper state of mind to meet the king. Unfortunately, my partner was rather tactless, and she immediately flung open the door after only a perfunctory knock.

“Hey!”

“How many times have I told you to wait until after I reply!” someone shouted angrily from within the room. The woman next to me didn’t seem to care. To think that *this* was my wife... I wished she would be more cognizant of our social standing.

“What did I do wrong? I *did* knock, at least. You should be thankful!”

The king sighed and then looked at me.

“Your Majesty,” I said, “thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.”

“I’m more than happy. After all, I have to hear you out where Yuna is concerned. I’m curious about what she’s been up to. What has our bear done now?”

I told the king about the tunnel Yuna had made through the Elezent mountains and how Mileela wanted to come under Crimonia’s jurisdiction.

“She mentioned wanting to see the ocean,” my wife noted, “but I never would have imagined she’d dig through the Elezent mountains to do it...”

“I don’t know what to say,” said the king, which was certainly the way I felt too. “And so Mileela wants to become part of Crimonia, I take it?”

“Yes.”

“Now, that’s not something you hear often.”

“It’s all due to Yuna again,” I said.

“What do you mean by that?” asked ElleLaura.

“Before I begin, don’t breathe a word of this to anyone.”

“Of course,” she said. “That’s why we picked this room specifically.”

I told them how Yuna had slayed the kraken by herself. The townspeople had taken a liking to Yuna, and because she lived in Crimonia, they had decided to join us.

The king shook his head, bewildered. “A kraken all on her own...”

“Cliff, this is all just too much... She really...?”

“She did. I wouldn’t come all the way to the capital to lie.”

“Right, right.”

It was all so...unbelievable. I could hardly even believe it, and I was the one saying it in the first place! But the reality was that the kraken was defeated and Yuna had saved the town.

“I understand now,” said the king. “You have my approval to expand your territory thus.”

“Thank you very much,” I said. “I have just one more request.”

“And what’s that?”

“Would the castle purchase the kraken materials from me?”

“The kraken materials?”

“That’s right. If we sell them in Crimonia, it’ll likely to be tied back to Yuna.”

“The townspeople know that she slew the beast, don’t they? I think it’s already too late.”

“They’ve already been asked not to talk about it. Everyone is so appreciative of Yuna, they wouldn’t refuse a request from her.”

Ellelaura sighed. “Oh, Yuna...”

“Even if word got out,” I said, “I don’t think anyone would believe it...but that might change if Crimonia begins to sell kraken parts.”

“If that’s how it has to be, I understand,” said the king. “The castle will buy it all.”

“Thank you very much,” I said. “But Yuna did take the mana gem.”

“She did now? Well, I would have wanted that, but I suppose we can’t do much about it.”

Ellelaura shrugged. “The kraken’s skin and materials still amount to a hefty sum.”

“I’d like to level the ground around the entrance,” I said, “clear out the surrounding monsters, and purchase the necessary mana gems for the tunnel with the money, Your Highness.”

“Understood,” said the king. “Anything else to report?”

“I would also like your permission to purchase a large quantity of mana gems for the tunnel from the capital.” I didn’t think it would upset the market price, but I let him know just in case there was any potential for upheaval.

“Ah, yes, yes. Ellelaura, inform the Merchant Guild.”

“Understood,” said Ellelaura.

That had gone smoothly. After this, I would take the day to rest and depart tomorrow.

“Also, Ellelaura, please have Zelef prepare a serving of lunch for Cliff as well.”

“You’ve got it.”

“What would I need lunch for?” I asked.

“You couldn’t possibly think you were done reporting on Yuna, now could you?” said the king. “I want to hear all the details over a meal!”

I very well couldn’t tell the king *I’d like to go home now, thank you very much*. Not at all.

“I’d be happy to enjoy a meal with you, Your Majesty.”

After that, I told him all the small details about what Yuna had done and about the state of Mileela in general.

This was all that blasted bear’s fault too.

Chapter 16:

Yuna and the Bears and the *Bears*

I WAS EATING PANCAKES doused with the honey I'd gotten after slaying the goblins and orcs. *Mmm*, deeeeelicious. Kumayuru and Kumakyu stood nearby in their cub forms, staring at me.

"Did you want some?" I didn't know if they wanted to eat the pancakes or the honey, but that was one a heck of a stare. My summons could eat food like any other creature, but they could also "eat" my mana.

"Do ya want some?" I asked again, and they happily crooned.

I cut up the remaining pancakes, stabbed a larger piece with my fork, and put it in Kumayuru's mouth. I put the next half of the pancake into Kumakyu's mouth. They ate it happily. I was glad they liked them, but they'd eaten all the pancakes I had left in two mouthfuls. I pet their heads and they let out soft croons.

"Hmm, where are you looking?" I followed their gazes to the pot with honey in it. I guess liking honey really was a bear thing, huh?

I took out a large spoon, scooped up some honey, and spoon-fed it to them. They were all smiles and croons. Since it made them so happy, I got carried away and kept spooning it to them until the pot was empty. Kumayuru and Kumakyu were waiting like they wanted even more, but I didn't have anything left to give 'em.

"It's all gone." I showed them the empty pot and their faces fell. "Oh, don't look so sad. I'll buy more for you." I gave them some gentle head pats. Looks like bears just love honey.

I headed to Mr. Lem's shop. I was curious about what had happened to the bear family, so I wanted to ask him about them. But just when I arrived at the

shop, it looked like Mr. Lem was leaving. “Bear girl?”

“I came to buy honey. Did I catch you on the way out?”

“Yes. Just going out for a bit. Gonna check on the forest situation. We’re selling plenty of honey thanks to you, so feel free to buy some.”

So Mr. Lem was going to the forest? “Are the bears in the woods okay?”

“Yeah, ’course they are. Once I mentioned your name to Lord Cliff, it was a done deal. I really can’t thank you enough.”

“I’m glad they’re safe. If Cliff gave the order to slay them, I’d have to fight people off.”

“Glad to hear you say that,” said Mr. Lem, laughing. “Now don’t joke about something so terrifyin’.”

Hey, I was serious!

“Can I go with you?” I asked. “I want to see the bears too.”

“I don’t mind of course, but I’m not sure we’ll be able to see them.”

“That’s fine.”

I boarded Mr. Lem’s carriage and we traveled to the forest with the bee tree. From what he told me, he’d still only spotted one of the bears, and from far away. So whenever he had some time, he was checking on the forest.

Oh, and hey—there was actually a road here. Like, a road big enough to take a carriage into the forest. We traveled along it until we reached the meadow filled with blooming flowers beside the bee tree.

“Hmm... It looks like the bears aren’t here.”

I looked at the bee tree, but nope. I didn’t see them either. Mr. Lem seemed a bit worried. And my bear detection skill was only good for finding monsters, which is...kind of ironic, given the name.

I summoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu, surprising Mr. Lem so much that he took a whole step back. “Kumayuru, Kumakyu, do you know where the bears are?”

They crooned and started walking.

“Looks like they know,” I said. “Are you coming, Mr. Lem?”

“Yeah, ’course I am.” Mr. Lem was startled by my bears’ appearance, but he nodded immediately. “So these are your rumored bears...”

With Kumayuru and Kumakyu taking the lead, we walked deeper into the forest. After a while, Kumayuru let out a loud crooning call that echoed through the trees. Somewhere further into the forest, an answering call echoed.

It was one surprised after another for Mr. Lem. “What?!”

“Are you calling them for us?” I asked my bears.

Kumayuru crooned softly and we waited. Before long, the parent bears and their cubs came out of the forest.

“Oh, it’s the whole family. Thank goodness.”

Yep, the father, mother, and the two cubs were all accounted for. They were really here. Kumayuru and Kumakyu joined the family of bears.

“What an amazing sight,” said Mr. Lem. “That’s quite a lot of bears.”

He sure had that right. It’d be a downright scary number of bears if we thought they were actually going to attack. But we knew they wouldn’t, so it was way cute.

As we watched the bears play, one of the cubs came over to me. Oh, how adorable. I gave its head and body some scratches.

“M-Miss...” said Mr. Lem uncertainly. “I want to thank the bears. Think that’d be all right?”

Did Mr. Lem think I could communicate with the bears directly or something? Still, guess I didn’t mind that.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu, Mr. Lem wants to say thank you. Could he go up to them?”

My bears seemed to start a conversation with the other bears. Then Kumayuru came over to us and nudged Mr. Lem’s back.

“What’s goin’ on?” he asked.

“They’re saying you can go closer.” Or that’s what it seemed like, anyway. I

couldn't tell *exactly* what they meant, but I could at least tell how Kumayuru and Kumakyu felt.

"Oh, is that right?" Mr. Lem slowly approached the bears. "Thank you for protecting me all this time."

Mr. Lem touched the father bear, who nuzzled Mr. Lem as well. That seemed to make him happy. Then he petted the mother and thanked her.

"Is it okay if I pet the cubs too?"

"Cwoom." At that, both cubs trundled over to his feet.

"Pretty cute cubs..." Mr. Lem sat down and hugged them. "I never thought they would let me touch them." His face was glowing with joy as he pet them. "You're allowed to come eat the honey whenever you want, okay?" He almost acted like he was holding his own children.

For a short while—all right, actually for a long while—Mr. Lem played with the bear family until he was satisfied.

"Miss, thank you so much for today. After getting up close to the bears to thank them, I feel like we really connected." He genuinely looked happy, which made me happy too.

"I'm glad I got to see them. Glad that they were healthy too."

Sure, I'd already checked up to make sure their injuries had healed up, but I was still happy to see them. I wondered whether Fina and the others would like it if I took them with me next time?

"Is it okay if I come again to see the bears?" I asked. Trespassing was prohibited because of the bee tree, so I wanted to make sure.

"Of course. You can come any time to see them. I'm sure the bears would be happy, too."

In that case, maybe I *would* drop by next time with Fina and the others.

When we returned and I tried buying honey, Mr. Lem ended up just giving me a jar as thanks. Kumayuru and Kumakyu gobbled that up in no time though, so I

still wound up making another visit a few days later.

Chapter 17:

Ange and Princess Flora

I—THAT IS, ANGE—had only left the room for a moment, but that was somehow still enough time for Lady Flora to sneak out. She sometimes even slipped out on her own. She certainly did take after a certain *someone*.

I was about to go look for her when she came back with Lady Ellelaura—or rather, Lady Ellelaura had brought the girl back, but with someone new. Next to Lady Flora stood a girl who was dressed as an adorable bear. Behind them was another girl around ten years old.

Just who were these girls?

Lady Flora giddily held the bear girl's hand.

Lady Ellelaura turned to me. "Ah, Lady Flora seems to have captured us. But the girls are my guests, so don't worry."

"Yes, madam." I felt much better after hearing that. At least the two didn't look dangerous...

Lady Ellelaura suggested that Lady Flora read a picture book, but Lady Flora didn't like the ones in her room. Then the bear girl asked Lady Ellelaura for some paper and something to draw with.

Lady Ellelaura handed her some paper and a pen, and the bear girl started to sketch. Lady Flora seemed so happy standing beside the bear girl and watching her work. I could see that the other girl, the rather ordinary one, was having trouble figuring out what to do. I guided her to a chair. The poor thing had gotten so nervous that she'd frozen up.

Whatever sort of girl she might be, just about anyone would be tense after being taken to a princess's room, no matter how young that princess might be.

I tried asking the small girl some questions. Her name was Fina, and the bearish girl seemed to be called Yuna. As I understood it, they had been taking a tour of the castle when Lady Flora had appeared and eagerly hugged the bear

girl, Yuna. Although Fina answered my questions, her mind seemed distant.

After speaking with Fina for some time, the bear girl completed the picture book. I even had a chance to look at it myself once everyone had gone home. The pictures were cute and round, and the book itself was titled *The Bear and the Girl*.

The story concerned a little girl looking after her sick mother. She gets saved by a bear. It was wonderful that the little girl worked so hard for her mother, and the part about the bear helping her was also quite nice. The drawings were very cute too, which pleased Lady Flora.

I was ever-so-grateful to Yuna.

A few days later, something surprising happened: we received word from His Majesty that henceforth, Yuna would be able to come and go from the castle as she pleased, and would additionally be permitted to visit Lady Flora. We were also ordered to treat her as a guest.

It was a little hard to believe, of course, but I wasn't about to question His Majesty. That said, if she was going to be treated as a guest of the king himself, perhaps it would be rude to just call her Yuna without a proper title...

Recently, Lady Flora's pastime was finding people working in the castle and reading them the picture book Miss Yuna had made.

That worried me. The book had been bound, but what if it got dirty or torn? Miss Yuna had drawn the book personally for Lady Flora and there was one copy in all the entire world. If anything happened to it, Lady Flora would be positively heartbroken. And how would I even tell Miss Yuna about something so dreadful?

"Lady Flora, shall I carry that?" I asked.

"I can do it." She was carrying the book closely and preciousy. I was a bit worried, but at least there wasn't any water around and the floors weren't dirty. Yes, it would be fine.

Whenever Lady Flora approached anyone who was in the middle of work, they'd stop to see what she had to say.

"I'll wead this pik-ture book to you!" Who could resist that smiling face? Of course, some of the people were busy. In those situations, they earnestly bowed their heads and earnestly apologized. Lady Flora would be sad, but cheering her up was my job.

"Shall we go over this way today?" I asked.

"Uh-huh."

I was sure there were some people in the middle of cleaning in this direction. And sure enough, as Lady Flora walked down the hallway, we came across Molnaka. She was a brisk young woman in her twenties who had been working in the castle for about a year.

"Good morning, Lady Flora." Molnaka greeted the princess with a smile.

"Do you have a bit of time, Molnaka?"

She looked at the picture book in Lady Flora's arms. Since it served as good reading practice, I'd asked the workers to occasionally put down their work aside to let Lady Flora read to them. Molnaka seemed to understand this.

"Can I wead the pik-ture book pwease?" Lady Flora asked, holding it up.

"Yes, that would be all right."

Lady Flora beamed. She was ever so adorable.

We moved to a spot nearby where we could take a seat. Lady Flora climbed up on my lap and opened the picture book. Molnaka seemed a bit envious of me, but this was my special privilege as Lady Flora's wet nurse and caretaker. I had taken care of the princess since she was a baby, and—though I hesitated to say it—she was in some ways as dear to me as my own child.

"In a cewtain town, thew was a smawl girl."

Molnaka sat next to us and listened to Lady Flora, smiling. It was actually quite popular among the castle workers to let Lady Flora read to you—even something to boast about. The times when Lady Flora walked through the castle varied, as did the locations, so it was actually quite unlikely that any

individual person would luck out and be read to.

But I was able to listen to Lady Flora from my special seat. Every time she spoke, her cute voice made the world a cheerier place.

“The girl got on the bear’s back!”

There was a picture of the girl riding on the back of the cute bear. Just seeing it for the first time, almost nobody could take their eyes off of it. Even Molnaka keenly eyed the cute pictures for some time.

The images Miss Yuna had drawn were very cute. The bear in the book wasn’t scary either—it had been drawn far too charmingly for that. As the book continued, the girl was able to find herbs with the bear. Then the girl brought medicine to the mother.

“Tank you, bear!” After the girl thanked the bear, that was the end of the story and Lady Flora’s narration.

“Thank you very much, Lady Flora,” said Molnaka, and Lady Flora looked overjoyed to hear such praise. “You read that very well. If you don’t mind, please read it for me another time.”

“Uh-huh, I can!” It was quite something for Molnaka to get that promise. You’d need a fair bit of luck to get a second reading from Lady Flora.

Lady Flora headed to the next place in good spirits. Reading the book to others had become a part of her daily lessons.

“Ange, where did you buy that picture book?”

“The picture book?”

I’d finished aiding Flora for the day, and I was spending time with Morissa—another person who worked in the castle with me.

“The book Lady Flora was reading for us earlier,” she said. “I was thinking of buying a copy for my own daughter, but I couldn’t find one.”

“It isn’t sold anywhere.” I explained how the bear girl had drawn the book for Lady Flora in her bedroom.

“She drew that for Lady Flora? On the spot?”

I wouldn't have believed it either if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. Lady Yuna had drawn it right then and right there. It was as if she had enchanted hands—or, well, enchanted bear gloves.

“So it's not for sale? Everyone was begging me to ask you where to buy it...”

Really? Others had asked me the same thing. I also had a daughter the same age as Lady Flora and I wished I could have one for her, but there was only a single copy in existence.

“In that case,” said Morissa, “we could start a petition. Do you think they'd make books for us if we asked?”

That was a good idea. I'd support a petition too—I wanted one for my daughter, after all. And if we had more copies, it wouldn't be so terrible if Lady Flora's book were damaged. I made sure to write that in the request.

Chapter 18:

Fina's Trip to Mileela

THE FIRST DAY.

While I counted the kokekko eggs with my mom and Shuri, Yuna came by. I wondered what she wanted, and then—out of nowhere!—she asked for permission from my mom to borrow me...and my mom said yes!

To “borrow” me? What, do Yuna and my mom think I’m just a thing?

When I asked why she needed me, she said she wanted me to go with her to Mileela. She must’ve remembered when I said I wanted to see the ocean. That made me happy. I wish she’d said that from the beginning, if that was what she wanted.

But...I had work, didn’t I? I wasn’t so sure, but mom gave me a push. With Mom’s permission, I was going to go to the ocean.

“All right! Time to borrow your little girl, then.”

Mom laughed. “You can take her anytime.”

They were really toying around with me. Ugh, it made me so embarrassed! My little sister Shuri looked like she was jealous of me, though... She wanted to come with us. Shuri said so, and then guess what?

Yuna invited her too, and now Shuri was coming with us! Yuna’s so nice.

We got on Kumayuru right away and headed out. Shuri made a real scene on top of Kumayuru. I understood why she was having so much fun, but it wasn’t nice for Kumayuru, so I told her to please calm down.

Kumayuru ran on the road really fast. Next, we ran through the path in the forest. There were so many people working there. Shuri gave them a big wave from on top of Kumayuru. They waved their hands back. It was nice to see!

When we got through the forest on the path, a really big bear statue was

there to welcome us.

A bear? But...why? It was the same bear as the one in front of Yuna's shop.

I asked Yuna about it, but she didn't seem to want to talk about it. I didn't mention it again, but come on...it was definitely connected to Yuna, wasn't it?

The inside of the tunnel was bright from mana gems.

Whoa, this was the tunnel? Kumayuru and Kumakyu ran through it. We saw the same stuff for what felt like forever. That sure made me nervous, but after a while we found people in the tunnel. Apparently they were setting up mana gems. Seeing them made me feel a little relieved.

There weren't any light mana gems after that, though. It was pitch black. Yuna's light magic had to brighten up the tunnel, and the magic light was shaped like a bear head! It was super cute.

Once we got out of the tunnel, there was a really big pool of water that stretched out as far as I could see. It was really the ocean. Whoa...it was a whole lot bigger than anyone had told me. All water, on and on and on. Shuri opened her eyes wide, too, when she saw it, but no way we could open our eyes wide enough for all that water.

I never imagined I would see something like this, never ever...

Yuna asked us if we wanted to try going up to the ocean. Shuri and I nodded and smiled. As if we'd say no! The ocean water was real cold, and salty too. It was real-life saltwater. It made my throat hurt, so Yuna brought out regular water for us.

Whew, that really helped. Yuna laughed when she saw us like that. (That was kinda mean, Yuna!)

Then we headed to the seaport.

(We saw a bear partway there. We saw a really big bear. Apparently that was Yuna's house, but why was it so big?)

When we got to the seaport, everyone talked to Yuna. She was real popular. Then she introduced us to a really muscly man at the inn named Deigha. He was almost as big as Ralock from the adventurers' guild. And oh, apparently, he was real amazing at cooking!

Then Yuna told us why she came to the seaport. She wanted to dig up these thingies called bamboo shoots. Since it would be super lonely digging them up by herself, she had invited us. Huh? I thought she invited us to see the ocean!

But then again, we *did* get to see the ocean, so I decided to help Yuna...even if I didn't know what these bamboo shoots were supposed to be.

Deigha seemed interested, too, so he was coming along with us to dig them up.

After we ate his food, we went to the bear house. It was big. I mean, it was *real* big. There were two bears! She made it so she could bring the orphans here, she said, but still. Real crazy big.

When we went inside, there was a giant dining hall. The second floor was a huge room too. Everyone would be sleeping here if they came over, she said. We went up to the third floor, where we would be sleeping. As for the fourth floor, it had the biggest bath I ever saw. It was split into boys and girls, of course.

It was a little early to take a bath, but we had to get up early tomorrow so we were going to take one and then sleep. We got naked right away and went into the bath, but there wasn't any hot water in the bathtub. It was empty! Yuna had just come back home here, so I guess it made sense. Anyways, we washed our hair and ourselves while the hot water built up.

I washed up my sister and then cleaned myself. With that done, I tried to wash Yuna's hair. Yuna's hair is really long and shiny. She's thin and her arms are all dainty and she's pretty! Where did her thin arms get the power to beat up monsters from? Maybe it really was magic? But then again, she would also punch adventurers with her arms, too.

I helped Yuna wash her hair, but I kept wondering about it.

The second day.

The next day, in order to dig up this food called bamboo shoots, we headed out early in the morning. We slept early, so I wasn't tired at all! When we got to the entrance of the seaport, Deigha waited for us. He had a hoe on his shoulder and was ready to go.

We got to the bamboo grove Yuna told us about. Were these bamboo?

They were like thin, green tubes. They made a hard noise when we hit them a little. No way we could eat these! Deigha seemed to think the same thing since he asked Yuna about it. But then Yuna dug the ground with magic and brought something up.

Apparently, it was *gonna* be a green tube when it grew up, but it wasn't a tube yet. When I touched it, it was soft. This was a bamboo shoot and she said it tasted good. Yuna knows so many things!

But when it came to digging, Shuri and I had nothing to dig with. It was okay, though, because Yuna held up her bear puppets in front of her and Kumayuru and Kumakyu came out. I was going to dig with Kumayuru and Shuri would be with Kumakyu.

"Kumayuru, I'm counting on you!"

"Cwoom!"

We all went different ways and I worked with Kumayuru.

I went a little far away. Maybe this would work?

"Kumayuru, do you know what to do?"

"Cwoom," Kumayuru crooned and dug the ground. Then, before I knew it, there was a hole and one of those things Yuna showed us was in it! Kumayuru let me do the last part, where I pulled the bamboo shoot from the hole. It was kind of hard to do, but I did it all right! It was weird thinking we could eat this, but I looked forward to seeing how it tasted.

I carried the bamboo shoot and headed back. One was done.

“Yuna, is this okay?” I checked in with Yuna while she was digging with magic.

“Yep. Do your best to get lots. I want to make them for the orphans to eat.”

“Okay, I’ll work hard.” I went back and got to work. Kumayuru would find the shoot and dig them up, and I would pull them out at the end and take them back.

When I was in the middle of carrying them, I ran into Shuri. “You’re so fast, sis!”

I won when it came to how many shoots I brought in, but we never saw Deigha.

When I asked Yuna about that, she said she hadn’t seen him either. I guess that it really *was* hard to dig them up without Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

After that, we gathered lots of bamboo shoots and Yuna told us we were done. Shuri seemed sad that she lost to me, but I couldn’t let my little sister beat me. Shuri worked hard, though, so I made sure to be a good sister and say nice things about her.

Yuna went out to find Deigha since we hadn’t seen him, not even once. She came back right away, but Deigha only had one bamboo shoot. It looked like he couldn’t find any. Kumayuru was amazing for finding them so easily and digging them up for me.

When we got back to Deigha’s inn, Yuna started cooking right away. I tried to help, but she told me, “You’ve gotta be tired from working since morning, right? Take a load off, guys.” Shuri and I sat down on the chairs to rest.

After a while, Yuna lined the table with the bamboo shoot dishes she made. All of them looked good. When I saw the food, my stomach growled a little since I hadn’t eaten any breakfast...but nobody heard it, which was good. That would’ve been real embarrassing.

Shuri and I started eating. Shuri was starving, so she stuffed her cheeks full as

she ate. Of course, I ate too. It was super delicious. Yuna was amazing for being able to make a meal that even Deigha, the big muscly cook, didn't know about.

Then, since Shuri and I wanted to, we went to see the ships.

They call the place where boats line up together a "port." There were lots of different ships floating in the port. They got on them and went to catch fish in the big wide ocean. Shuri looked like she wanted to ride a ship. I did too, but we couldn't be selfish and say that.

While we were looking at the ships, Shuri found a big one and ran toward it.

"Shuri, wait!"

It was dangerous to run off, so I went after her.

When I caught her and calmed her down, people came out from behind the shadow of a boat. When they saw Yuna, they started talking to her. Did they know her? They did, and their names were Damon and Yuula.

Then (I can't believe it!) Damon said he would let us ride his ship.

The ship moved on top of the water. First it went real slow and then it gradually built up speed. Shuri made a big deal about it. Yuna yelled at us not to fall out.

The ship went further and further away from shore. The cold wind blew on us. It was scary, but it was fun too. I think I probably wasn't scared because Yuna was beside me. When Yuna's there, I feel real peaceful.

Ever since I met Yuna, the scenery I saw changed a lot. She took me to the capital. This time she took me to the ocean. If I hadn't met Yuna, I never would have seen this scenery.

Yuna...thank you.

The third day.

Once we got to the seaport, a pretty woman was sort of glaring at Yuna. She called out to her.

She was the guild master of this seaport's adventurers' guild, and her name was Atola. Yuna had helped out the seaport before, so she was kinda mad that Yuna didn't come see her. That wasn't good of Yuna. You really had to say hello to the people who helped you out.

At first Atola seemed mad, and I was worried she was scary, but then I talked to her, and guess what? She was nice! We talked about Yuna, and we even had a lot in common. Yuna saves a whole lot of people who are in trouble, doesn't she? She's so nice!

After that, we stuck with Atola. We went over to the market where they had all the fish they caught in the ocean. There were tons of fish I'd never seen before there. They were completely different shapes and sizes compared to the fish that swam in rivers.

There was also something that wriggled, but not like the fish. It looked a little gross, like it had a bunch of fins or arms. Could you really eat this? Yuna said that it was very yummy, but I think you'd need to be brave to eat something so slimy and wriggly.

The next place we went after the market was a place with shops, lined with food stalls. There were lots of different delicious smells coming from the food stands. When Shuri and I looked like we wanted to eat some, Atola and Yuna gave us money. She said it was a thank you for digging up the bamboo shoots.

"Yuna, thank you." I thanked Atola too. Then, I grabbed Shuri's hand and we headed to the food stalls.

"Sis, let's eat this one." It said grilled squid on the sign. It smelled good! I bought one and Shuri and I split it. (We used to split small bits of food a lot in the past too.) It was a little tough, but it was good.

Since Shuri's mouth got dirty from eating the squid, I used my handkerchief to clean her off.

Next up, we ate things with grilled fish and roasted vegetables. Shuri wanted to eat lots of things, but we couldn't fit that much into our stomachs. The last

thing we bought was seafood, and we had to try hard to finish it up.

I was stuffed. I couldn't fit anything else in. Shuri wanted to eat more and more, so I just bought everything!

But then again, everything had been really good!

After that, we went back to Yuna, went to the trade guild, talked to people, and decided to go home tomorrow.

It was a very fun three days.

I do hope we come here again!



ILLUSTRATION GALLERY



STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 6



STUDENT CHAPERONE

After returning from a short trip to Mileela, Yuna heads to the capital to guard Shia's practical training experience at Ellelaura's behest. She guards not only Shia, but her classmates Cattleya, Maricks, and Timol. While on the two-day carriage supply run to a village, Shia and the others stumble into and promptly slay some goblins before arriving at their destination safe and sound. But as they stay overnight at the village, monsters appear and cause a disturbance.

The students barely have time to rest after this battle when a new report comes in: monsters have appeared near the shed where the village silkworm nests are kept. And even worse, some villagers have been left behind. The students race to the shed and find a black tiger there. As the students recoil from the formidable foe, Yuna steps forward to display her strength and dispatches the creature easily.

This earns her the students' respect. The return trip home is uneventful, and Yuna reports her success in guarding the students to Ellelaura.



GRAND OPENING OF THE BEAR'S DINING ROOM

After returning to Crimonia, Yuna brings copies of her picture book to the orphanage and passes some time eating a meal with Cliff. As the development of the tunnel to Mileela has been completed, Anz and the group that will be working with her come to Crimonia. They are led to the shop and immediately begin preparations for the grand opening. However, one of the women among them, Neaf, wants to work at the orphanage instead of the shop. Though an argument breaks out over shop uniforms, opening day comes for the Bear's Dining Room and things go smoothly enough.



SEEKING A MITHRIL KNIFE

Yuna asks Fina to harvest the black tiger she slew when guarding the students, but Fina says her knife isn't up to the task. Thinking it would be good to buy a better knife, Yuna takes Fina to Gold, the blacksmith in Crimonia. However, Gold doesn't have a mithril knife that can harvest a black tiger. Gold refers them to a blacksmith in the capital, and Yuna brings Fina along to see him. They run into Shia at the capital and visit the blacksmith together. Unfortunately, the blacksmith—Ghazal—doesn't have a mithril knife available either! Golems have appeared in the ore mines, leading to a nationwide mithril shortage. After hearing the full details, Yuna heads to the adventurers' guild and is asked by Sanya and Ellelaura to exterminate the golems. Yuna leaves Fina in Ellelaura's custody and embarks on a journey to the mines...

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Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear 6

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Chapter 19:

Mileela's Damon

THE SUDDEN ARRIVAL of a kraken in the town of Mileela robbed us of our ability to go out to sea. The only highway to other towns was overrun with bandits, so we couldn't travel along that either. The rich had left.

In a month, the seaport had a food shortage.

After talking with my family, I decided to climb over the Elezent mountain range to buy food in Crimonia. My wife Yuula and I climbed the steep mountain to get there—we heard that it was possible, despite the danger. But as we got closer to the summit, a strong snowstorm obscured our vision until we couldn't see in front of us.

Every single step was a nightmare. We grew numb and couldn't walk. There was nowhere to avoid the storm...and then something fell down behind me. Yuula had collapsed. I shouted to her over the roaring storm, but she didn't move. I tried to carry Yuula on my back, but I was too weak.

My body was at its limit too. I thought of the children. It was no use. Bit by bit, darkness swallowed me.

When I woke up, I was in a warm house with...a girl in a bear outfit? She gave me something warm to drink and something to eat. The food was delicious, and its warmth spread through my shivering body.

All of that was shocking enough, but then I found out the house itself was in the mountain range.

The girl in the bear outfit split her provisions with us. She said that showing her around Mileela would be thanks enough for her, so we ended up going back the way we came down the mountain.

We went down on bears, of all things. Apparently, these were the bear girl's summons. The bears easily clambered down the mountain we toiled so hard to

climb. It was downright dreamlike.

After days of mountain climbing, we returned home in less than a day.

All kinds of things happened after the bear girl came to the seaport. Food appeared. The bandits on the highway were subdued. On top of that, the trade guild master was implicated in a plot with the bandits.

We could travel on the highway, so a caravan headed out to buy food. Sure, it would take time, but we had hope. All thanks to the bear girl...

Since there was a kraken in the ocean, I'd been staying at home—no point in a fisherman like me going out, after all—when all the fishers were instructed to gather under old man Kuro's name. Many fishers were already gathered at the rendezvous point by the time I arrived.

Old man Kuro came before us and told us we were to stay at home and not go near the ocean under any circumstances the day after tomorrow.

"What's going on, old man Kuro?" I asked.

"You know what you need to know, lad. Under no conditions are you to approach the ocean on that day, hear me?" We were already avoiding the ocean on account of the kraken, but it was odd for old man Kuro to go out of his way to give us one specific day to *especially* avoid it.

"For better or worse," he continued, "the seaport's fate will be decided then. If the worst happens, I will take responsibility for it. But on that day, do *not* approach the ocean." Stubborn old Kuro bowed his head low, looking pretty serious for a man who had just told us to keep doing the thing we'd already *been* doing.

"Old man Kuro," I said, "we understand, so please raise your head. We have no idea what's going to happen, but we trust you. We'll follow your instructions. Right, everyone?"

"Yes, that's right." We vowed to old man Kuro that we absolutely wouldn't go near the ocean on that day.

Still, I found myself so troubled by old Kuro's words that I couldn't stay cooped up in my house that day, so I went for a walk around the seaport to distract myself.

Even walking around town, I couldn't help but wonder what was happening with the ocean. I didn't have to go *near* it to see what was going on. Just a little closer, and...

Odd. The adventurers' guild staff were standing in front of the seaport exit gate as though they were blocking it. I tried talking to them, but they stonewalled me. "We're not letting anyone through today."

Just what was going on? Did it have to do with old Kuro's warnings?

I tried a few other angles to get a look before, suddenly, a commotion broke out at the gate. At the center of it...was the bear girl, collapsed on her white bear.

What had happened to her? The adventurers' guild master was trying to go in with the bear, but the gate guard seemed troubled about whether to let the bear through.

Huffing and furious, the guild master quietly scolded everyone: She said that the bear girl had defeated the kraken.

Hold on, she'd *defeated the kraken*?

That was ridiculous...right? She said that the girl had defeated the kraken on a cliff just a little way from here. But the bear girl had used up too much mana fighting the kraken and collapsed.

It couldn't be real. I mean...*could* it?

Well, the guild master told us we'd see it if we headed over. Several men, me included, ran to the cliff to check if our seaport was saved.

When I got to the cliff, panting with exhaustion, a terrific amount of steam rose all around. I was sweating something awful, but where was the steam coming from? I followed it...several gigantic bear statues appeared from the steam, rising from the ocean and surrounding a dead kraken.

I couldn't believe that the girl in such a cute bear outfit could've done this. I mean, people talk about not believing something till you see it with your own eyes, but even seeing it wasn't helping much. Still, the kraken that had tormented us was unmistakably dead in the boiling ocean.

Something rolled down my cheek. Oh, I...I was crying. I hadn't even noticed. Flustered, I wiped away my tears. I wasn't the only one crying, though—the others who ran over with me were sobbing too.

The kraken lay below us, defeated at last.

I headed to Deigha's inn where the girl was staying.

She'd apparently collapsed from exhaustion from her fight with the kraken. The guild master, Atola, asked us to let her rest, since she was sleeping so peacefully right now.

I understood, but I wanted to thank her—we all did—and before long there was a crowd of townspeople gathering around the inn.

Atola and the innkeeper Deigha finally addressed us: "If you want to help, bring rice for her. Even a slight amount would be fine. Out of all food, that one will really make her day."

Murmurs all around, then. "Rice, you say?"

"Will that really make her happy?"

"Yeah, I bet it will. When she wakes up, I'm sure she'll be over the moon."

"Right. Better than making a ruckus and waking her with it."

We all headed home—it sounded reasonable—and I told my family about it. We picked what little rice we had for her (there was nothing else I could offer), and I brought my daughter with me to the inn so we could give her the gift.

There were already several other townspeople there, pouring the rice into a giant barrel that it looked like Deigha had prepped. Limited as our food supplies were, everyone was still eager to bring the girl rice from their limited food supplies.

My daughter poured our rice into the barrel too. “Dad, do you think this will make the bear girl happy?”

“Yeah, I’m sure it will.”

She smiled. “Thank you, bear girl.” My daughter held my hand and said her thanks. I really wanted to thank the bear girl in person, but this was all I could manage for now.

The girl had battled something so nightmarish, so incredible, that I couldn’t even imagine the ordeal. She had probably risked her life in that fight. I mean, I’d seen her collapsed on that white bear.

She deserved a good rest.

The next day, I headed out to the ocean. The sway of the boat, the smell of the sea—it was like coming home. A smile snuck up on my face—and not just mine. All of us sailors were smiling. It’s hard to explain to an outsider, what the ocean means to us.

After I caught fish and headed back, I was asked to come to the nearby beach, since we’d be harvesting the kraken. The bear girl and old man Kuro waited for us there.

The waves had hidden just how massive the kraken was. We ended up splitting the work to harvest it.

I’d heard that the kraken materials were all going to the seaport—the bear girl had done that for us too. No way I’d believe somebody would do that...or I never *used* to think somebody would. She could have asked us for an inordinate amount of money for her deed, but she didn’t ask for a thing.

If I weren’t here—if any of we townspeople hadn’t seen it with our own eyes—I don’t know if we’d have believed it.

The girl in the bear outfit really was a mystery.

The townspeople were grateful to her, but things started to get hectic after she saved the seaport. The feudal lord of Crimonia came by: They’d discovered

a tunnel connecting us to that town. They said that the bear girl had come across it, but I didn't buy it. If any tunnel like that had existed, she never would've gone out of her way to climb up the Elezent mountain range.

She'd slain the kraken. I wondered what else she might be capable of...

Since the tunnel had been discovered, we were going to have food delivered from Crimonia, but we'd need to secure a route for the carriages to travel along. It was all pretty urgent, so the new trade guild master Jeremo had his work cut out for him.

Heh. It cracked me up, thinking about that dawdler becoming guild master, but...he was an alright guy, all things told. With him serving as guild master, the trade guild would do well for us all.

Now, after all of that, I had business at the trade guild—with Jeremo, specifically.

"Heya, Jeremo! Looks like you're busy."

"Is that you, Damon? Looks like you've got time on your hands."

"Ha! No, I was out working in the ocean today, as usual."

"Sounds like fun. I'd like that."

"If you ever come along, be sure to thank that girl again for opening the waters to us. And now we have so many orders for fish from your trade guild."

Jeremo rubbed his temples. "You sure do. We've had it rough here. I've got to manage the food coming in from Crimonia, the distribution of the seafood—and—why'd I end up in this mess?"

"Because that's the kind of man you are. You work your butt off for the seaport."

Jeremo snorted. "I work hard? News to me...and to all the people who talk about me."

"I also know you've been kind to the townspeople."

"Bit of an overstatement."

“Oh, shut it. You’re a good guy, Jeremo, and you always seem more surprised about it than everybody else.”

Right then, Anabell—the guild worker from Crimonia—appeared. She seemed like a...hmm. How do I put it? Let’s call her a thorough and inflexible woman.

Jeremo jumped. “Anabell?”

“You do try to skip out on work,” she said, “but the townspeople like you. The moment I dropped your name and said you needed help, the lot of them were willing to lend a hand. They send you things, you know. Yes, I feel like I understand why the elders chose you to be the guild master.” She tilted her head. Inexplicably, I thought of knives. “But I do wish you would stop skipping out on your work.”

Jeremo offered a sheepish smile. “Uh, could we call this a break?”

“How many hours has it been, now, Jeremo?” Yep, that was a knife-look. “The future of this seaport rests on your shoulders.”

“My delicate frame, you know, ah...” He cleared his throat. “I don’t know if I could carry something quite so heavy.”

“Then you’re fine with the seaport going to ruin?”

“No, no. I’m simply saying that it could be someone else who does this. You, for instance.”

Anabell shook her head. “If I were to do it, the seaport’s revival would take ages. After all the disasters this place has suffered, they need someone they can trust. We both know that I’m not that person.”

“And we both know that *I’m* not the greatest of—”

I broke in: “Quit it, Jeremo. You know who else trusts you? *Me*. Since I know it’s you, I can entrust the fish I catch to the trade guild—no, to everyone here in seaport, working in harmony—without worrying.”

Jeremo turned to me, bleary-eyed. He must’ve been pulling some rough all-nighters. “Damon, come on. Do I look like I’d actually be motivated to work just because you said that?”

“Heh. No way.” Jeremo and I burst into laughter.

He didn't look it, but Jeremo was a guy who got things done.

Later that day, I headed out to the ocean. A few other fishers sailed along with me—by coincidence—and on the gentle waves, we drifted past the place where the girl had slain the kraken. The gigantic backs of the bear statues loomed, and we sent our thanks.

The sea waited, with all of her bounty, and my heart swelled with gratitude that we could visit it once again in peace and safety.

Thank you.

Chapter 20:

Reporting to the Academy

Maricks' Chronicles

IT WAS THE DAY after we returned from our practical training. We were reporting to our teacher today so they could check for any inconsistencies between what we had to say versus what the adventurer assigned to us—Yuna—described.

But man, I did *not* want to do it. “Ahhhhh...”

“That’s a heck of a sigh, Maricks. What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing. Just nervous about the report today is all.”

Yuna said she had reported the facts. According to her, the villagers would’ve told the truth, so our teachers would easily figure out if any of us were lying anyway.

I generally agreed...but I was pretty sure we weren’t going to get a good evaluation. We mocked the adventurer who was responsible for guarding us. We ignored her instructions and acted on our own. Every time we were supposed to have listened to Yuna, we ignored her instead. We just didn’t think a girl in a bear suit like her could have been an adventurer, let alone a strong one at that. If all of that was part of the test, we were definitely getting a nasty grade.

On top of that, there was our evaluation for slaying monsters...well, maybe. Monster slaying wasn’t part of the practical training this time around, so we’d done something that was outside our range of duties as students participating in an exam.

Still, I didn’t think going to rescue the villagers had been a mistake. If I ever saw someone in trouble again, I’d do the same thing, practical training or not. That’s what it means to be a knight—or I think so. Plus, that’s who I want to be.

As I was waiting in the classroom, Jiguldo's group returned from giving their report.

"Maricks, your group's up next."

"You're all done?"

"Yeah. We didn't have much to say, so it was pretty quick."

Well, glad that *he* could be so damn lighthearted about it. In fact, all the parties reporting before us were in and out like it was nothing. We were the last ones. I kind of suspected that we'd been set to give our report last because they knew it'd be long.

Would they even believe us? I mean, how much would they even believe from Yuna?

"Let's go, Maricks," said Shia.

"Sure."

"You don't have to worry. My mother was there too."

"Did Lady Ellelaura say anything?"

"I went straight to bed when we got back yesterday, so we haven't talked yet."

I did the same thing: just went home and crashed, totally exhausted.

All we could do was tell the unvarnished, absolute truth. We took the place of Jiguldo's group in the room where our teacher waited for us...along with, to our surprise, Lady Ellelaura. I looked at Shia—she looked just as shocked as the rest of us. I guess her mom hadn't mentioned she'd be here.

"Looks like you're the last ones," our teacher said. "Please, take a seat."

We sat down obediently.

"I've heard everything from Lady Ellelaura, but I couldn't believe it. I plan to check in with the village, but I want to hear what happened all from you first."

We told them the plain truth with no flourishes, telling them exactly what we'd experienced during the practical training...even if it all seemed unbelievable.

Our teacher seemed shocked, but he managed to keep quiet and listened, probably because he'd heard it all from Yuna earlier. All he did was ask some clarifying questions from time to time.

"I think I've got the gist of it all," said the teacher finally. "I'll check in with the village later."

"Sir, are you going to dock us any points?" Timol asked. Our teacher seemed a little troubled and looked at Lady ElleLaura for help.

"We won't subtract nor add points," she said. "It's important that you thought to save the villagers when they were in trouble. Please know we're not upset at you for that. You'll all grow to be leaders in the future, so I don't want you to abandon people in need. But I hope you're aware that your actions were terribly rash. Consider your own position before you act."

"So...did we do things the right way?" Timol asked.

I generally understood what Lady ElleLaura was saying, but Timol didn't seem to get it. He wanted a simple right or wrong.

"What's right varies from person to person," said Lady ElleLaura. "There is no one correct answer."

Timol went silent.

"But you also didn't make a mistake," she added. "Not all of your actions were correct per se, but don't go thinking that they were *mistakes* either."

"That sounds really complex."

"Such is life. Nothing is entirely correct, nor entirely incorrect. Sometimes we realize that something was right or wrong only after the fact. That being said, not consulting with your adventurer *was* a major mistake. The adventurer is a proxy for your teacher. I can't condone the fact that you disregarded Yuna and did something dangerous."

She had a point, but we never would've consulted Yuna—not when she was dressed in that *bear* costume. Who could believe that she was a strong adventurer when she looked like that?

"Lady ElleLaura," said Timol, "the way she looks... I mean, no one would..."

Timol was making excuses, but I got how he felt.

“Not judging someone based only on how they look was part of this exam. We wanted to see how you behaved when faced with a girl dressed as a bear.”

“Why was that part of the exam?”

“Because it was *incredibly* amusi—” Lady Ellelaura’s eyes widened, and she broke into an exaggerated cough. “Ah, my apologies.”

Amusing? Seriously? It’s not like I couldn’t hear her...

“There are many people you can’t judge by their appearance,” continued Lady Ellelaura. “A ragamuffin may be a spy or an assassin in disguise. A king may dress as a commoner and slip out of the castle for his own enjoyment. Likewise, an adorably dressed girl in a bear suit might be an excellent adventurer. Judging someone by their appearance is but one tool we have. I want you to be able to properly judge people based on their character without focusing on what they look like. That’s why I requested Yuna for your practical training.”

I could understand what Lady Ellelaura was saying. Yuna was the perfect example of someone you couldn’t judge based on appearance. But if there was anyone on the planet that could tell that Yuna was a great adventurer from first impressions alone, I wanted to meet them.

Ultimately, we didn’t lose or win any points for our practical training. There were some things we got right and other things, well...not so much. We went to rescue the villagers, but then the black tiger had appeared. In the end, we had to admit that Yuna rescued us.

Would we have been lauded if the black tiger hadn’t appeared? Well...if we rescued the villagers, I think I would’ve kept making the same kind of decisions without even thinking about them. Was that the wrong thing to do? I didn’t necessarily think so, but it made me want to consider my actions more carefully.

“It’s important to think things through so you don’t do something you regret,” said Lady Ellelaura, a weighty finality in her voice. According to her, thinking about things from multiple perspectives would help us figure things out when we were in a jam like this. Made sense, I suppose.

There were all kinds of perspectives we could take: as a student, as a single person, as a knight, as a teacher, as an adventurer. By considering things from different viewpoints, I could understand my own thoughts and feelings better.

All I knew for sure was that I was weak. Seeing Yuna fight helped me realize just *how* weak I truly was. I trembled and froze up in front of that black tiger, but that small bear girl had fought it off all by herself. I had no idea how much training I would even need to get strong enough to face a black tiger.

“Yuna sure was strong...” It just slipped out of my mouth as we were heading home, our report to the teacher finished.

“What’s gotten into you all of a sudden?” asked Shia.

“I just thought about how if Yuna hadn’t been there, I think we might’ve died.”

“You’re entirely right. We should be very grateful she saved us.”

A few days later, my father found out about the details of the practical training and how I put everyone in danger by acting without thinking, dismissing the instructions of the adventurer with us. He really chewed me out, and even took a few swings at me.

But...he also complimented me for trying to save the villagers. It was a bit painful, but I was happy to get some praise.

Chapter 21:

Anz Departs for Crimonia

NEAF AND I were cleaning up the shop when she asked me a question. “Say, Anzy, are we really allowed to come with you?”

“Yeah, it’s fine. I got permission from Yuna.” She’d come by the other day with two girls and I’d asked her then.

Neaf and the others were working at the inn until we headed off to Crimonia. I wanted them to practice their customer service skills.

“Are you sure we shouldn’t be learning how to cook?”

“You can all prep seafood already. That should be enough for now. Just get used to serving customers, if you could.”

“If you say so.” Neaf returned to cleaning. As for me, I was taking some last-minute extra cooking lessons with my dad.

“Heat’s too low, Anz!”

“Right!”

“Too salty!”

“Yes, sir!”

Dad was strict, but a great teacher. Sometimes I could see a sadness there in his eyes, but the moment quickly passed, and he was back to acting suave.

As Neaf and the others got used to their jobs, word came that the tunnel would be finished soon. I needed to know more about upcoming carriages to Crimonia, so I headed to the Merchant Guild.

“Excuse me. Are the carriages to Crimonia running? I’d like to go as soon as possible.”

“Apologies, ma’am, but all of the carriages scheduled for the tunnel’s opening

day are full.”

“In that case, what’s available?”

The receptionist flipped through and examined some papers. “The third and fifth day are all booked currently. However, we do have openings on the seventh day.”

From what she said, trips to and from Crimonia alternated by the day, departing on the first, third, fifth, and seventh day of the week...but the first was full, and it seemed that several other days were out of the question too.

I didn’t think Yuna would be upset if we were a little late, but I still wanted to meet her expectations and get there early. But there was no fixing that now, and it was my fault for not checking earlier.

Still, there was nothing I could do though, so I got ready to make reservations for the seventh day. That’s when I caught sight of a man in the back with dark circles under his eyes. It was the Merchant Guild’s master, Mr. Jeremo. He often came to our shop for meals.

“Oh, Anzy! Is that you?”

“It’s been a while, Mr. Jeremo. Nice to see you.”

“What are ya here for? Ordering some meat for that brawny father of yours?”

“No, not today. I came to check for carriages to Crimonia,” I explained.

“Now that you mention it, aren’t you going to work at that bear girl’s shop in Crimonia? It’s sad to see such a pretty hostess go.”

“Don’t worry, my mom’s still sticking around.” From there, I explained that I’d wanted to go on a carriage on the opening day, but there were no spots left.

“Opening day, huh...?” Mr. Jeremo pondered.

“I guess it’s impossible, huh?”

“Everyone’s hyped about it, so there were quite a few reservation requests. Still, I’d like to do something for you if I can, especially since you’re going to be working for the bear girl.” Jeremo put his hand to his chin thoughtfully. “Yes, I believe I’ve got you covered.”

“Really?”

“Should you *really* be promising that, guild master?” A guild employee who’d been listening butted in on our conversation. Yeah, I wasn’t so sure about this. Would it really be so simple to find space on a carriage when all the spots were full?

“Well, where there’s a will...” Jeremo mused.

“You don’t think it’s really that easy, do you?” A serious-looking woman had appeared. She was one of the people from Crimonia’s Merchant Guild, if I recalled.

“Ms. Anabell...” Mr. Jeremo looked at the woman as though he’d been spotted by his least favorite person in the world. “But this is an associate of the bear girl, the one who saved the town. She’s going to work for the bear girl’s shop in Crimonia. She’s waiting for Anzy, so I’ve got to do something, even if it’s just something small like this, right?”

Mr. Jeremo was really laying down the excuses. He threw down another: “And Anzy’s going to be making seafood in the girl’s shop with ingredients caught in Mileela. That’s basically profit for the fishermen, the Merchant Guild, and everyone in town.”

Now *that* seemed like an exaggeration. I was just going to make the food my father taught me in the shop, but he was making it sound like the whole fate of the town was on my shoulders.

Ms. Anabell seemed to think it over. “All right. Let’s see what we can do for you.”

“Really?” I hadn’t expected that from Ms. Anabell. I thought she’d do everything by the book, but I guess I was wrong.

“I think it’ll be good to have food produced in this town spread throughout Crimonia,” she said. “If people like the cuisine and want to make it at home, that increases both trade and the number of people coming to Mileela, thus revitalizing the town’s economy. And of course, we can’t mistreat an associate of Yuna’s after she saved the town—that girl can hold a grudge.”

I guess Yuna was more influential than I thought.

Ms. Anabell turned to Jeremo. “Goodness, Mr. Jeremo, I didn’t expect you to work that brain of yours so hard, and all for the sake of the town.” She grinned sweetly. “Why, I suppose you wouldn’t even mind if your workload increased...”

“M-Ms. Anabell, please! If my workload increases any more than this, I’ll die.”

“Nonsense, you don’t nearly have that much work yet. And I *would* give you a break, but with the tunnel opening, things will only get busier, you know.”

“B-But...!”

“*But* the new guild staff have started to learn their jobs, and the older employees have really improved. Before long, you’ll be able to delegate more tasks to others. Just keep up the good work until then.”

It seemed to me that Ms. Anabell was saying that bit about the employees more loudly because she knew there were staff around us. They seemed happy to hear it; it was a smart way to praise them without doing so directly.

“Guild master, I’ll be doing my best as well, so let’s keep it up together.”

“Me too!”

The employees spoke up encouragingly, but Mr. Jeremo looked like a deer in the mage lights. I asked my dad about the whole thing later.

“Now everybody around him is motivated, ya see. You’re always gonna feel the heat a bit more when that happens.”

Oh, I understood what Mr. Jeremo was going through all too well.

Mr. Jeremo and Ms. Anabell arranged for five carriage spots for me, Neaf, and the others.

Dad, Mom, and my older brother saw us off on the day we were leaving.

“You better not come running back here,” said Dad.

“Make sure to write to us,” said Mom.

“Safe travels!” my older brother added.

Dad looked at Neaf and the others now. “I know how my daughter is now, but

don't you leave her on her own."

"Dad, you sound like you're marrying me off!"

"Oh, do I?"

"We'll do our best to support Anzy," said Neaf. "Don't you worry."

A couple of the others spoke up too. "We're all here with her, so everything will be okay."

"Mm-hmm! Anzy isn't alone in this. Ask if you need anything, okay?"

I really did believe them. If I really was alone, the anxiety might have crushed me, but just being with people I knew made me feel so much better.

"I'm going to work so hard," I swore. "It'll be bustling any minute! Okay... I'm going to get going."

It was time, so I gave my family a hug and bid them a farewell for now.

Chapter 22:

Noa, Fina, and the Bear Bread

I HAD A DAY off from my studies as a young noble, and so I decided to visit Yuna's house. But unfortunately, she wasn't there. Where had she gone? I'd wanted to see Kumayuru and Kumakyu. How unfortunate...

I wandered the streets without a goal or a destination until I was near the Bear's Lounge. Perhaps Yuna could be there? There were a ton of customers inside the shop today—that is, even more than usual. Was something happening? I headed inside the Bear's Lounge and saw lots of people gathering. The bread counter was swarmed.

What was going on? I approached the counter where the bread was displayed and heard some unfamiliar orders.

"I'll take six bear breads."

"I'm sorry, they're limited to one per customer."

"In that case, I'll take three. One for each of us!"

"Okay, three it is."

"And we'll also go with a loaf of that bread there! Oh, and that one too."

"Okay, thank you very much."

Had I just heard the words *bear bread*, or was that my imagination? No, I heard correctly: the next person at the counter also ordered bear bread. I peered through the gaps in the crowd. Various breads were spread out before me. They all looked delicious. Then, finally, there they were...

"Bear bread?" Yes, there were breads in the shape of bear faces. What exactly *was* this?! They were so cute. I simply needed to try them, so I quickly lined up.

Customer after customer in front of me ordered bear bread. At this rate, I wondered if they'd sell out before I'd have a chance to buy one.

And there was another one. "I'll have a bear bread please!"

Ooh, they were disappearing so fast.

“Lady Noa?” someone said. I turned around, and there was Fina: a perfect interrogation candidate.

“What is this bread, Fina? I didn’t know it existed!”

“We only added it a few days ago. They’re so popular! It’s been really busy.”

Then I suppose it was only natural I wouldn’t know about them. I hadn’t come to the shop in the past few days, after all. Still, I was a little embarrassed that I, the president of the bear fan club herself, hadn’t been in the know about this delectable new item.

“You should have told me,” I said. I rather thought it was her duty to report this, with her being the vice president of the bear fan club.

“Ah, sorry.”

“Well then, I shall eat some bear bread immediately.” But when I looked back over to where they were selling the bread, there wasn’t a single one left. “Ah! My precious bear bread!!!” They’d sold out...

“I’m sorry I distracted you by talking...”

“No, it’s not your fault, Fina.” It really wasn’t. I was happy to see her and that’s why I’d let myself get distracted. Still, the thought that I wouldn’t be able to buy bear bread made me miserable.

“Lady Noa,” said Fina, noticing that I seemed down, “do you have some time right now?”

“I do.” My whole day was free.

“In that case, do you want to make some bear bread together?”

“You can make it?”

“I’ve practiced enough, I think. It should work out fine.”

I would get to make bear bread myself?! This was a first-time experience for me. It sounded like it could be fun. “Yes, let’s do it. But where will we make it?”

“They’ll probably let us borrow the kitchen,” Fina said, then she pulled my arm and led me there. When she entered, she spoke to a woman who was

baking bread. Her name was Morin and she was the one who ran this shop.

“There’s an open space over there you can use,” she told us.

“Thank you very much, Ms. Morin,” said Fina, and came back over to me.

“Lady Noa, I got permission to use that spot and some ingredients. We should be able to make the bread there.” She pointed at an open table.

“May we really?”

“Yes, we can.”

Fina started preparing the dough. It came in two colors, one with some coloring and one that was white. “I’ll make one first, so please copy what I do,” she said.

“Okay.” I nodded and Fina started kneading the white dough. She made it round as a bear’s face. Then she made small spheres of brown dough and placed them on the bear’s head.

Even before it was baked, I could see it—that was a bear’s face.

“Now you try it, Lady Noa.”

I copied Fina and made my own.

“You’re very good at this, Lady Noa.”

“You can save your flattery, Fina. Yours is so obviously better.” That was clear as day when you put out bear breads next to one another. But if I made them over and over, I bet I’d be able to make them as well as Fina. I picked up some more dough.

“Lady Noa, how many are you making?”

“Well, how many *can* we make?”

“We have plenty of ingredients, but if we make a lot, we won’t be able to eat them all.”

I guess that was true. We didn’t want to make too many and let the rest go to waste, but I still wanted to make more.

“In that case,” I said, “I want to make some for my father and Lala. Is that okay?” A capital idea, if I say so myself! Father and others could eat the bear

bread.

“Yes, that should be fine. Let’s make them.”

We got to work on making tons and tons of bear bread. The white breads, Fina explained, were called Kumakyu bread. The brown breads were obviously Kumayuru bread. They weren’t selling it with those names in the shop, of course, but I personally felt that everyone knew it was the only proper name for such treats, deep down in their hearts.

After shaping the bread, we borrowed a stone oven to bake it.

“I’ll do the baking,” said Fina, placing it into the oven rather skillfully. I wanted to try too, but my lack of experience would’ve only been a nuisance and I couldn’t have that. “There. It’ll be done after it has some time to bake.”

I waited in front of the oven. It was hot there, but I stayed and watched the bear bread bake. After a while, it started to smell delicious.

“That should be enough.” Fina took the bread from the oven. The bears’ faces were well-browned and perfectly baked.

They looked like such cute bear faces, I almost felt it was a waste to eat them. And, sure enough, my bears’ faces were a bit off compared to the ones Fina had made. But I’d made these breads myself, and that made me happy.

“All right then, let’s eat.” Fina opened her mouth wide and chomped down on the tasty-looking bread.

“You’re not trying it, Lady Noa?”

“It’s just...I feel so bad for the bears...”

When I said that Fina laughed.

“What’s so funny? I don’t get it...”

“Everyone is like that when they first eat these. I was too, and so were the orphans. They didn’t really want to eat it.”

I could understand that feeling exactly. I felt a little bad eating such a cute bear face. But I made up my mind and took a big munch out of an ear. It was hot, but the delicious, savory flavor soon spread throughout my mouth. “It’s so

good.”

Not long after the first bite, the rest of the bear’s face very quickly disappeared.

“Lady Noa, I’d so glad they turned out well.”

“All thanks to you, Fina,” I said, which made Fina both happy and self-conscious.

I took a lot of bear bread home after that. I handed it out to my father, Lala, and everybody who worked at the estate. Father was surprised when I told him that I had made it. I was happy to see the shock on his face.

I wanted to bake more sometime soon again.

STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 7



THE BEAR PERFECTS ELECTRICITY MAGIC!

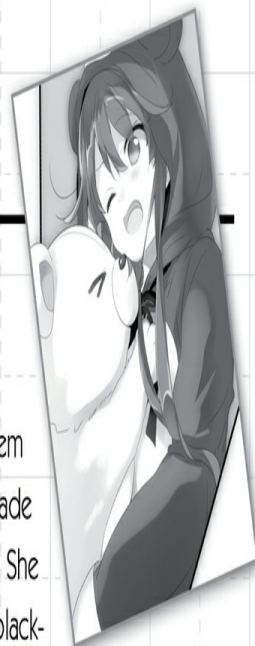
When Yuna arrives at the mining town, she descends into the mines with Jade's party, whom she had gotten to know while was guarding the students. As they continue through the caverns, she detects another party on her bear map. New monsters appear when they go down a level, and according to Yuna's detection skill, there's also a mithril golem. When Yuna's group sees the bozo rangers fighting the mithril golem, they decide to temporarily withdraw back to town as it would be a faux pas to intervene. The bozo rangers retreat shortly after themselves.

Having decided to go it alone, Yuna separates from Jade's party after they give up on slaying the mithril golem, and she does some private training. Wielding her new electricity magic, she faces the mithril golem one-on-one. But when Yuna starts worrying about a possible

cave-in, she moves the mithril golem outside using her bear transportation gate and launches it into the sky with a bear uppercut! It collapses, and she destroys its exposed core with an electrified bear punch. After defeating the golem, she acquires a mysterious ore called "bearyllium" from deep within the caves.

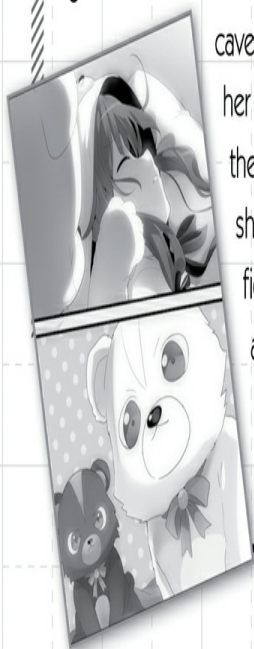
LET'S ORDER SOME MITHRIL KNIVES!

Yuna returns to the capital to report the golem extermination and receives a mithril knife made for self-defense as a reward from Ellelaura. She takes the mithril golem with her to visit the blacksmith Ghazal and she orders two knives for fighting instead of a harvesting knife. Since she's taken the time to come to the capital, she goes to check on Morin's former shop as well. She finds a girl standing in front of the building, and the girl introduces herself as Morin's relative, Nerin. Yuna tells her about Morin's current situation, then returns to Crimonia and commissions a mithril harvesting knife from Gold.



THE DEVIL'S FOOD

Seeing that they were selling strawberries in town, Yuna tries making strawberry shortcake. Everyone participates in a hugely successful taste test. Morin puts Nerin, her niece, in charge of the cakes at the Bear's Lounge. Wanting to have Princess Flora try some too, Yuna visits the capital both to visit the castle and to pick up those mithril knives from Ghazal. The palace chef Zelef participates in the second taste test. Deeply moved, Zelef requests for Yuna to teach him how to make the cakes. He also proposes opening a shop in the capital.



Story:

Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear 7

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Chapter 23:

Fina and Shia Stay Up Late

TODAY WAS AN ABSOLUTELY *ginormous* deal. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd meet the king, queen, and even the princess! Meeting the king, talking to him, receiving headpats from him, eating with him... It was all so very strange. Even if I told my mother and father about it, they'd probably never believe that I was telling them the truth.

When we were headed out, the king said, "You can visit with Yuna any time." Just thinking about it made my stomach hurt, but I was glad I made it out safely.

Also, Yuna went to the mines for a quest. She left me with Lady Ellelaura in the capital...

After finishing dinner and taking a bath, I went to my room. I was so tired, but finally I could rest. Thinking about tomorrow freaked me out, but I knew that I'd be able to fall asleep soon and forget all about it.

But wow... The room sure was big. I was alone on top of a gigantic bed in an even more gigantic room, several times larger than the room I shared with Shuri. I could even roll around on this bed. It was so fluffy and comfortable!

Still, I wondered if Yuna was okay. Before dinner, I talked to her with the bear phone and she *seemed* all right. She was strong, so I didn't think I had to worry about her, but how could I not? It was a dangerous job.

While I was thinking about Yuna, there was a knock at the door. I told them they could come in.

The door opened slowly and Lady Shia's face peered in at me. "Are you awake, Fina?"

"Yes, I am."

"Want to talk a bit before bed?"

I thought about it for a moment. “Yes, I would.”

Lady Shia came into the room and sat on the bed. Then she looked at me and smiled wide. She was so charming. “Your outfit is adorable.”

“A-ah, L-Lady Ellelaura and Surilina made me wear it, but I don’t think it looks right on me.” They picked out a nightgown with pretty white lace for me, and it was just like other clothes earlier this morning—they wouldn’t take no for an answer.

“It’s fine,” said Lady Shia. “It looks good on you.”

“Oh, but it’s embarrassing.” Clothes this adorable just didn’t look good on someone like me. They would’ve been better for an aristocrat, like Lady Noa.

“Mother is just happy to have an adorable girl like you in the house. She can’t see Noa often, so please humor her.”

“All right...” Would this really keep going on until Yuna came back? Just the thought of that made me feel weighed down and anxious. C’mon, Yuna, come back soon...

I talked with Lady Shia, but I felt nervous the whole time. Lady Shia was a noble after all, and I was totally alone, just talking to her like it wasn’t a strange situation.

“Are you worn out from being with my mother today?” she asked.

“Umm...” I decided to tell the truth and nodded. “Yes, I really am.”

“Ha ha ha! Well, was the castle fun?”

I told her that I was nervous because the king showed up. It had all been a lot to deal with.

“Is that what happened?” asked Lady Shia. “Bad luck, I guess. Or maybe good luck? It’s not easy to meet the king, after all. And you even got to talk with him face to face. Gosh, that’s pretty weird.”

I guess it was true that a commoner like me seeing the king—even talking to him—was normally completely out of the question. And I doubt any other

commoner in existence had eaten with him and even gotten head pats.

But was this good luck or bad? I wasn't sure.

"That reminds me," said Lady Shia suddenly. "You saved Yuna's life."

Huh? No, that was ridiculous. "I know that's what Yuna says, but... No, *she's* the one who saved *me*." I told her about when I'd first met Yuna.

"Oh, so you were lost in the woods and she saved you."

"She saved me when I was being attacked by wolves, but whenever she introduces me, she always says I saved *her*. I think she's doing it on purpose."

"Ha ha ha! But you two saved each other, didn't you? You saved her when she was lost in an unfamiliar forest, and she saved you when you were being attacked by monsters."

"But..." The forest was close to town, and Yuna had Kumayuru and Kumakyu. There was no way she'd get lost. No, I bet she only said that so I wouldn't feel like I owed her. Yuna was *such* a very nice person. I just wished she would stop introducing me as her savior.

"It's kind of cool that she gallantly charged in there, beat those monsters, and saved you," said Lady Shia. "Just like a knight in shining armor. Can you imagine if Yuna had been like that? It would've been like fate."

"Do you mean if Yuna was a guy?"

I imagined it, but then I ended up laughing at the very idea.

"What is it?"

"It's just, well... I just thought of my dad in a bear outfit, and it was just so funny to me." He was pretty much the only guy I could think of. When I imagined him rescuing me as a bear, I couldn't help but laugh.

"Pfft, you're right! You probably would never fall in love with a guy dressed as a bear, fate or not. I guess appearances really do matter, huh? But why does Yuna dress like that when she's already so cute? Her hair is so long and pretty under her hood. And to think she's an adventurer on top of all that cuteness.

And a strong one to boot.”

It was true. I’d seen Yuna when she wasn’t in her bear outfit, in the bath. She really was pretty.

“So you’ve been hanging around Yuna since that day?”

“Well, my family’s poor. My mom was ill and my dad had passed away. I was working as a harvester, but there wasn’t enough work. When Yuna found out, she started having me harvest monsters for her and paying me.”

I told her a little about the time before I’d met Yuna. When I talked about that, Lady Shia seemed sad.

“I had no idea. I’m sorry for asking you about that, I’m sure it’s hard thinking back to times like that.”

“No, it’s all right now. Yuna cured my mom, and now I have a new dad. We’re happy.”

“Huh. I guess Yuna’s sort of your guardian angel, then. Or, um...guardian bear?”

“Yes!” Even if Yuna wasn’t some knight in shining armor, meeting her changed my life. It was like she’d rescued me from walking down a dark road I couldn’t escape from.

If I hadn’t met Yuna, I would’ve been killed by the wolves, my mom wouldn’t have gotten better, I wouldn’t have a new dad...

If it hadn’t been for Yuna, I wouldn’t be here nervous with a tummy ache, and I wouldn’t have been able to talk with a noble like Lady Shia today, or meet the king, queen, and the princess. Actually, she made all sorts of things happen that I never would have even imagined just a while ago.

My life was so much happier now, since I met Yuna.

After that I told Lady Shia about the black viper, harvesting, and going to the ocean.

“Hwaaah...” But I was starting to get sleepy, and I couldn’t fight off a yawn.

“You seem tired.”

“I-I’m fine!”

“Don’t push yourself. My mother can be a little exhausting to be around, after all. It’s been fun hearing about your time with Yuna, okay? But now I’ll put out the light so you can rest.” The room went dark. “Goodnight, Fina.”

“Goodnight, Lady Shia.” As soon I said that, the drowsiness got to me and soon I was fast asleep.

But the next morning, I woke up and found...Lady Shia sleeping next to me? What was she doing here?!

Chapter 24:

Encounter with the Bear

Ghazal's Chronicles

A STRANGE-LOOKING GIRL came into the shop.

At first, I thought the kid was just window shoppin', but wouldn't ya know it? The kid had a letter of introduction from Gold himself. In the letter, he wrote that she was an excellent adventurer and he wanted me to forge her a mithril knife.

An excellent adventurer? This *kid*?

Again and again, I compared the bear girl in front of me to the description in the letter. The letter *did* say she looked like a bear, which about matched what she looked like. Gold wasn't much of a joker, sure, but this here girl dressed as a bear didn't look like much of an adventurer neither.

Still, I didn't mind makin' a mithril knife for her at Gold's request. Only issue was we had no mithril in stock. Couldn't get ahold of any precious mithril ore either, and even the costs of other kinds of metals were jacking up higher and higher. Hadn't hurt business for me, but it sure was a problem. I told the girl that monsters appearing in the mines was to blame for the shortage and she ended up heading to the adventurers' guild.

The cost of metals rose and rose. I had some iron and copper in stock myself, but they wouldn't last—not at this rate. For a while, I just couldn't buy any metals. Even if I did make weapons and the like, I'd have to increase prices to the point that nobody would buy 'em. What was that adventurers' guild even doing...?

A few days passed since the bear girl had come, and I'd just about forgot her when she came into my store again. She found herself some mithril and wanted

me to make a knife.

She told me one of them golems in the mines had been a mithril one and that she'd slain the thing, which was ridiculous. I would've laughed off most anybody who claimed that...except the kid pulled the golem out right then and there, before my very eyes.

The thing's limbs were pulverized from here to the heavens, leaving it in such a sorry state that I didn't even wanna imagine *what* she'd done to the thing.

I picked up part of the broken mithril golem, gave it a good look, and found somethin' curious about it. The thing's insides and outsides were configured from different materials. Looked like...iron? The inside was iron, and the outside was mithril. A fine imitation of a mithril golem, if I say so myself, and the thing was big enough to leave a hefty amount of mithril.

Two-thirds of the golem was iron and one-third was mithril...which still meant it was worth a fortune.

“Show me yer hands.”

I had her stick out her hands so I could make her knives. When I take a liking to a customer, I make sure to take a look at their hands and feel 'em so I can make the optimal weapon for 'em. If somebody's hands were big and the hilt was too small, they wouldn't be able to put any force into their blows. Opposite held true too. Can't grasp a big weapon right with tiny hands—you'll never get out what the weapon can truly do, like that. And if you make weapons, your trade is to make sure every customer can bring out that potential of their tools.

I grasped the girl's hands. They were small and soft. *These* hands had battled monsters, eh? Strange to think of that. She'd need to callous 'em up to properly wield knives.

Finally, I checked out her bear gloves. At first I thought they were jokes, but they felt mighty fine. They weren't made of a material I was familiar with, but they were unmistakably high quality. Pleasant to the touch too.

I accepted an iron golem as payment instead of money, but it ended up causing a ruckus in my shop. Customers kept makin' a fuss.

"What the—is that a *golem*?"

"Wow, it's a real iron golem."

"Mr. Ghazal, why've you got a...?!"

I always gave the same answer: "I got that from an adventurer as payment for a weapon." Got a real kick out of the look on their faces when I said it too. Word spread and it brought more clientele my way. They'd come for sharpening their blades *and* to see the iron golem in all its glory. Maybe it was only temporary publicity, but...I'd take it, y'know?

After that, I completed two fine mithril knives for the girl. I worked hard on them, and—

Just as I'd intended—they were they finest knives I'd ever forged. But the bear girl didn't come to pick them up. I had told her she could come any time, so couldn't she hurry it up? I'd put so much effort into making them.

I'd taken an iron golem as payment for these, and she had supplied her own mithril, so they hadn't actually cost me anything other than my labor.

I examined the knives I'd made for the girl. She'd hold one in each hand, so I made them black and white to match her gloves. These blades were designed according to which hand was holdin' 'em, though I wouldn't consider that for most customers. But in order to bring out the full potential of a weapon, you gotta take that into account.

I looked at her knives and had a brilliant idea. I carved the face of a bear onto a portion of each hilt—I do take pride in my detail work, when I do it. I put a bear face on the white and black handles. Animals and birds were sometimes part of a noble's coat of arms, so I carved the bears in like crests.

I'd done a mighty fine job, if I do say so myself. I didn't normally do this kind of thing, but I'd call it a thank-you for the iron golem.

Finally, the bear girl arrived.

You're late! I wanted to say, but she'd come all the way from Crimonia and she looked apologetic enough, so I couldn't bring myself to tell her off for bein' tardy.

I handed her the knives and she looked mighty pleased at the weapons I'd dedicated time in makin'. Seeing her happy made me happy as a craftsman.

The bear girl was looking at the knife, all happy-like, but when she noticed the bear crests carved on the handles, she made a displeased face for...some reason.

Anyway, then the bear girl said she wanted to test out the knives, so I gave her permission. I taught her that they'd cut based on her mana.

She took out another iron golem to test the knives. Just how many of those was she carrying? And how did she reckon she'd cut through an iron golem with these knives? The idea struck me as wasteful, but the customer is always right. And this here customer was gripping her knives rushing at the golem.

It all happened in a flash.

I'd barely seen her take a step, but...next thing I knew, she was behind the golem. Then, with a solid *thunk*, the golem's arm fell to the ground.

What was that? She was fast—quicker than my eye could catch. Not only that, but she'd sliced through the thing like it was nothin'. She kept at it, testing just how sharp the knives were. It was an unbelievable sight to witness.

I picked up a part of the sliced golem. It was a clean cut. Wasn't the girl a mage though? When I'd looked at her hands, it didn't seem like she'd handled many weapons. I'd seen my fair share of hands—strong people had hard hands, calloused hands, scarred hands—and I could tell they'd gone through training. But the bear girl's hands weren't like that. And yet the way she moved, the way she handled her knives...it was the technique of a high-rankin' adventurer indeed.

The girl said my knives were incredible, but *she* was the incredible one. I really

understood why Gold and Nelt both thought she was an excellent adventurer.

Chapter 25:

The Bear Investigates Tiermina

ONE DAY, I HEARD a rumor at the Merchant Guild that someone might've been trying to poach Tiermina.

Tiermina was good at her work, after all, and on good terms with the guild master Milaine. She also was very knowledgeable about eggs and knew how to make pudding, pizza, and cake. From other peoples' perspectives, she was very valuable.

If Tiermina wanted to leave, I'd respect her wishes, but I'd be in trouble if she quit on me.

I started out by getting a detailed background check on Tiermina.

First Testimony: Daughter #1

"Um, how has Mom been recently? Hmm, I don't think she's been acting strange. Has she met with anyone? Umm... Oh, the other day, she said she was meeting with someone, but I don't know who."

She didn't know who the person was, but maybe they were a recruiter? The rumor was starting to look more credible.

Second Testimony: Daughter #2

"My mom? She said she didn't know what to do since there wasn't any money."

Now here was some precious intel—and helpful too. Tiermina was having money troubles. Maybe she'd gotten offered a higher salary from the recruiter.

Third Testimony: Husband

"Are we having financial troubles? I...I don't think so, no. I didn't know

Tiermina was worried about money. I haven't heard anything like that at all: did she say that? Am I not making enough for us?"

The man bowed his head. I doubted I'd get any more intel from the guy.

Fourth Testimony: The Baker

"Has Tiermina asked me for advice? No, not really. By the way, how's she been recently? Oh, you know, come to think of it, she did ask me about my wages, but that was all. I told her I didn't have a problem with my pay."

I was happy to hear that, but I told her to tell me if she had any issues in the future.

Fifth Testimony: Guild Master

"Tiermina? I think she's amazing, of course. She's so quick with her work and always sticks to her deadlines. That's how you know you can trust someone. Oh, she's being recruited? Well, it's not us. We have plenty people right now. Would I want to recruit her? Hmm... Well, her line of work is slightly different. Ah! Now that you mention it, Tiermina was talking to another merchant when she came into the guild. Maybe they were scouting her? She is an important person at your shop, after all."

This was some breakthrough testimony. Someone was definitely trying to recruit her...and it was a merchant to boot.

Sixth Testimony: Woman Taking Care of Kids

"How has Tiermina been recently? Same as always, I'd say. Oh, but one time I did see her sigh. She looked a little worried."

Yep, Tiermina was in trouble for sure.

Putting together the testimonies I'd collected so far, I deduced that Tiermina was having financial troubles, was being recruited by another merchant, and

was thinking of changing careers. I invited her over to my house to see if I could put a stop to it.

“What would you like to talk about, Yuna?” she asked.

“How about a 30 percent raise? Or do you want 50 percent instead?” If I doubled her wage, it would be unfair to the others, so I didn’t think I could go much higher than this. Still, I’d have serious problems if Tiermina quit.

“Yuna, what’s gotten into you?!”

“Your wages. How much do you need to stay?” I cut straight to the point. I didn’t know how much she’d been offered.

“You’ve been asking around about me lately. Is this why...?”

“Uh. I...have no idea what you’re talking about...?” So Tiermina knew. Even though I told everyone to keep quiet, someone had blabbed. Who was the rat?

Tiermina let out a small sigh. “Everyone’s been asking me questions. Fina asked me who I was meeting. Shuri asked if we didn’t have any money. Gentz asked if he wasn’t earning enough, and he looked like he was about to cry. Morin said you were worried about me. Milaine asked me which merchant I was talking to the other day. And even Liz seemed worried. She asked me if something was the matter.”

It hadn’t been one rat: it’d been *all* of them! But why had they all gone to her directly?! I didn’t blame Fina and Shuri, but why had Gentz asked her that? Couldn’t he tell whether he was earning enough? And for some reason, Milaine, Morin, and Liz had talked to her too...

“That doesn’t mean I was the one investigating you,” I lied.

“They all mentioned you by name.”

“...Oh.”

“Why were you asking everyone about me?”

I gave up and told her. “I had heard that you might have received an offer from somewhere else. I wanted to see if it was true, so I started asking around. I figured that if I could understand why you were quitting, I could prevent it.”

Tiermina let out a heavy sigh. “You were really looking into something as silly as that?”

“So it’s true? Someone scouted you?”

“Yes, and they had a good offer. They probably wanted information about the shop. But I wasn’t just going to sell them the information, especially since they would’ve been done with me as soon as I gave it. Also, anyone who would sell someone out wouldn’t last long at a new job anyway. You can’t trust that sort.”

“Then why were you so worried and sighing and saying you didn’t have money?”

“They kept trying to recruit me, to the point that it was putting me on edge. But once I told Milaine about it, she put an end to it, so it was fine.”

“Tiermina, please tell me about those things next time. You probably worried everyone.”

“You’re right. Sorry about that. I’ll tell you next time.”

“But that doesn’t answer the thing about the money...”

“Oh? Let’s see... Yes, that’s right. When I was working in the shed, I realized I’d forgotten my coin purse. Shuri probably overheard me saying I didn’t have money to buy groceries on the way home.”

So it had all been a simple misunderstanding. “How about when you asked Morin about her wages?”

“If someone wants to poach your employees, they might not stop with me. I was asking her about that indirectly. If her wages were low, there was a chance she’d start looking to go somewhere else, so I was trying to prevent that.”

So she’d been worried about others too.

“Well, I’m a little sad that’s how you see me,” Tiermina teased, playfully pouting. “Did you really think I’d leave you over money? You saved me and my children. I’m healthy and working because of you, and I’m well enough to stand up and hug my daughters. I got to marry Gentz, and you pay me plenty in terms of wages. Somehow, I ended up with a job that lets this mother hang around with her daughters *and* have evenings off. Yuna, don’t be silly. I’d never betray

you.”

Tiermina smiled and poked my forehead. I guess I shouldn’t have worried.

“You’re stuck with me,” she said.

I guess I’d be working with Tiermina for a long time.

Chapter 26:

Noa Works at the Shop

WHILE I WAS HAVING LUNCH, Noa came into the Bear's Lounge. She noticed me right away.

"Are you eating as well, Yuna?"

"Do you mean you're about to join me?"

"Yes, I came to eat here too. It's been so long. May I?"

"Go for it."

"In that case, I'll order. Please wait for me."

Noa ordered some bread and cake, then came back.

"The bread this shop sells is so delicious."

"I appreciate it, Noa. Thank you." Noa ate her bread as she looked around the shop. Wondering what she could have been looking at, I followed her line of sight. She was watching the kids on the job.

"Yuna?"

"What is it?"

"I would also like to wear the bear clothes," Noa said, sounding quite serious as she watched the kids in their bear jackets.

"Uh...seriously? I mean, you're not joking?"

"I am serious. Fina and Shuri get to wear them. I'd like to as well."

Where did this come from? And what was I supposed to do about it? "Even if you want to wear it, it's still the shop uniform."

"Then do I need to work at the shop? I can do that. Now please, let me try on a jacket, won't you?" Noa put her hands together and begged me. Seeing that, I couldn't just tell her no anymore.

“Mil, hey, sorry. I know you’re busy, but Noa says she has to wear one of the bear jackets and work.” I’d called over Mil to fulfill Noa’s wish, and we were at the changing room.

“Fine by me, as long as it’s just for a short time.”

“Thank you.”

Mil seemed thrilled when I rested my hand on top of her head. Then I had Mil prepare a bear jacket. “Lady Noir, I did wash this, but...are you sure you want to wear my clothes?”

“I don’t mind! That’ll do just fine! Really, I mean it!”

“Are you sure?”

Mil seemed kind of put off by Noa’s enthusiasm, but Noa undressed and changed into the bear jacket Mil had prepared her.

“Do you have a mirror?” she asked.

“We have one over there.” They’d had a big mirror for a while to make sure they looked ready for work. Noa posed in front of it.

“Hee hee hee... I’m a bear! Grrr!”

“Noa,” said Mil, “you’re acting kind of scary...”

“At last, I’m wearing the bear clothes!” Noa declared.

“Since you’re wearing those clothes,” I said, “we’re going to put you to work.”

“Yes, ma’am! Of course.”

“And you can’t fool around in the shop either. If you complain, it’s over—got it?”

“I swear on the bear that I wouldn’t dream of it!”

What was that supposed to mean? Was she swearing on herself now?

I decided to have Noa start with washing the dishes.

“Make sure you’re doing it right.”

“I’ve got it.”

Noa didn’t seem unwilling at all as she started to wash the dishes. When Morin saw that, she called me over, seeming worried.

“Yuna, are you sure you can put the lord’s own daughter to work washing dishes?”

“That’s what she wanted.”

“Are you sure her father won’t be upset later?”

“If he gets mad, I’ll take the blame. Should be fine.” Based on Cliff’s personality, it wasn’t like he’d storm into the shop or anything. If he got mad at anyone, it’d probably be Noa.

Noa didn’t complain at all as she washed the built-up dishes.

“Yuna, I’m done! I want to bake the bread next. I made bear bread with Fina earlier.”

“Hmm, how about we save the baking for next time?”

“Aww, but...but I’ve practiced!”

At that moment, Morin called over the kids in the kitchen. “If any of you are free, please peel some potatoes.”

“Okaaaay!”

One of the kids helping Morin answered back, picked up a knife with her tiny hand, then started to smoothly peel a potato. She was pretty skilled at it.

“Good job there.”

“Thanks, Miss Yuna! I practiced really hard.”

Noa immediately raised her hand. “I want to do it too!”

Morin blinked. “Noa?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “It’d be dangerous. She has to use a knife and all...” If I let a noble get hurt, we’d have a problem on our hands.

“I’ll be okay.” But man, she was completely gung ho about it.

“Are you really sure?”

“Yes!”

Where did all that self-confidence she had come from? Now it was making me anxious.

Noa picked up the knife with her tiny hand and tried to peel a potato. It looked so dangerous, I just couldn’t watch. Her knife slipped in a weird direction.

“Nope, no—” I took the knife from her “—you’re going to hurt yourself!”

“Wh-what are you doing?!”

“Noa, no knives for you. No sharp objects.” I couldn’t let her use any—it just looked too dangerous. “This isn’t your first time using a knife, is it?”

“Pssht! I’ve used knives, um...well, a couple...of times...” She mumbled that last part. I sighed. She was a girl from a high-class family. Guess that was just how things were. Fina and the orphans used knives all the time. Fina had learned the skill from butchering, and the orphans from cooking.

Noa forlornly set the potato on the table. I scratched my head and thought for a while.

“Noa, do it this way. Now watch carefully, okay? I’m not sure you’ll really need to know how to do this, since you’re an aristocrat, but...”

“That’s not true at all. Please teach me like anyone else.”

I picked up the potato and knife, then slowly started showing her the proper way to peel it. It would’ve been nice to have a peeler, I’ll admit, but the kids never needed them. Maybe it could make things go smoother, though...

Noa peeled the potato clumsily, but exactly like I’d shown her. “Uhh, this is hard...”

It was probably my imagination, but even the bear on her hood looked kind of

bummed out.

After that, the three of us (me included) peeled the potatoes that Morin had asked for.

“I couldn’t peel that many,” she groaned.

“Everyone starts out as a beginner.”

“Even you, Yuna?”

“Even me. Everybody starts from zero, including.” I consoled Noa, then we started moving toward the dining area after she asked for her next job.

“Am I serving customers next? Just leave it to me. I’ll handle the money, pick up stuff, and wipe things down.”

She did a turn, showing off her bear outfit.

Why was she so into this?

When I took Noa into the dining area, the kids were milling around doing their work with Karin at their center. Let’s see...

“I guess we’ll have you help out with picking things up? Um, hey, Karin!”

Karin was supervising as the lead on the floor. “Miss Yuna, what is it? Oh, I feel like I’ve seen that girl somewhere before.”

Noa pulled off her hood so her face was more visible. Her long blonde hair flowed out.

“Lady Noir?”

“Yep. She’s helping out with the shop today in exchange for being able to wear the bear clothes.”

“Uh, Yuna...are you sure? She’s a noble...” Karin looked at me, then back at Noa.

“Well, she said she wanted to do this herself. I was thinking she could help clear the tables. If she gets in the way, just let me know.”

“No way will I get in the way. I’ll follow any direction you give me. Miss Karin,

what would you like me to do?”

“In...that case, could you clear the plates off the tables that customers have left? And wipe them down too, please.”

“Do you know how to do that, Noa?”

“I’ve seen everyone else working, so I should be able to manage,” Noa declared. And off she went to clean the tables, her little bear tail wagging from side to side.

“Ms. Yuna, are you really sure we should be doing this? No one is going to summon me about it later, right? I won’t get in trouble for it?”

Karin sounded just like her mom.

“It’ll be fine. I’ll take all the responsibility for it.”

Karin’s worries aside, Noa’s one day of work experience came to a close with nothing of note happening.

“I’m not paying you a wage for this, but we do have some pudding and bread if you want to take it home,” I told her.

“Thank you.” Noa accepted the bag and started to leave.

“Noa, wait one moment.” I grabbed her shoulder.

“Wh-what is it? I need to head home soon.”

“You can—after you’ve changed.”

“Ugh, I thought I’d almost gotten away with it...and with the bear jacket.”

She’d end up in trouble with Cliff and Lala if she went home dressed as a bear. She really seemed to forget her station sometimes. “C’mon, go change.”

“You’re so very mean, Yuna,” Noa pouted.

She got changed back into her usual clothes—and then tried to walk out the shop still holding the bear clothes in her hands. She really didn’t know when to give up. Did she want a bear jacket that badly?

Though she didn't get to take the jacket home, Noa did look very pleased with herself when she left. Hmm. Maybe I'd better prepare a bear jacket for the next time she stopped by...

STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 8



MISA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY INVITATION

After Yuna returns to Crimonia from the capital, she orders stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu from Sherry, who works at a tailor. The bears are for Princess Flora, who has taken a liking to Yuna's bears. Yuna drops by the adventurers' guild and returns to her bear house for some R&R when an out-of-breath Fina turns up to see if Yuna has gotten an invitation to Misa's birthday party as well. Since neither of them know what to do when invited to a noble's birthday party, they go to ask the feudal lord Cliff for advice. Cliff tells them not to worry as the party is just a family affair, so Yuna decides to attend. Yuna prepares cakes and stuffed animals as Misa's presents, then heads to the town of Sheelin ahead of the party with Cliff and Noa, who are also attending Gran's birthday celebration.

GRAN IN BIG TROUBLE

Yuna and the others arrive in Sheelin, where they're treated as guests at Gran's estate. Once there, Yuna, Fina, Noa, and Misa go for a walk around the town. As they sample food at the market, the son of the Salbard family—the co-rulers of the town—picks a fight with them. The Salbards are unhappy with their joint leadership over the town and have

been harassing Gran. Botts, the head chef in charge of the food for the birthday party, is attacked and injured. Upset by the plotting of the dastardly Salbards, Yuna offers to help by bringing a substitute chef. She picks up the head chef of the royal palace, Zelef, at the capital. With her summons, Kumayuru and Kumakyu, she brings him to Sheelin in the blink of an eye. With a chef secured and the Salbards' plot foiled, Gran's birthday party is a success and the Salbards are shamed.

CAKE AND STUFFED ANIMAL PRESENTS

As they wait for Misa's birthday party, Yuna plays Othello with everyone, runs into some moles with Marina's adventurer group, exterminates the creatures, and then has fun passing the time until Noa's mother, ElleLaura, comes to Sheelin. On the day of the party, Yuna is forced to put on a dress. She gives cakes and stuffed animals to Misa and an iron golem to Gran as presents, which creates quite the fuss at the party.



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Chapter 27:

Encounter with the Bear

The Queen's Chronicles

I WAS DRINKING TEA in my room when my daughter, Flora, stopped by.

"Mommy, read me a pik-tur book." She held out the picture book in question.

"Oh, I wonder what book this is," I cooed.

"The bear book," Flora replied.

What she handed me wasn't a properly bound book. When I turned the pages, I found it was filled with charming illustrations of bears. "Where did you get this?" I asked her.

"From bear," she replied.

"From a bear?" I repeated. She had gotten a bear book from a *bear*? I pondered that for a while, but still didn't understand.

Flora's caretaker, Ange, came to my aid. "The other day, Lady Ellelaura was with a girl dressed as a bear. That girl drew the picture book for Lady Flora."

Dressed as a bear? Whatever could that mean?

"The bear was cute," Flora said. "Fwuffy and soft!"

She was making such a moving effort to describe the bear to me, but I simply couldn't picture such a thing. A girl that looked like a cute and soft bear? How intriguing.

I read the picture book for Flora.

A girl was doing her best looking after her mother, but disaster struck, and she was attacked by wolves—that was when the bear came to her rescue. The picture book was about a little girl taking care of her sick mother. It was simple, but it taught children just how precious mothers were.

“Would you help me if I fell ill, Flora?” I asked my own daughter.

“You’re sick, Mommy?” My daughter clung to my clothes with her tiny hands. She was close to tears, the poor thing. “Are you dying?”

“I’m quite fine,” I said quickly. “See? I’m healthy as can be. I’m not going to die.”

“Weally?”

“Yes, really,” I said. “So don’t you fret.”

“Uh-huh!” she said, and once again she was all smiles. That brought a smile to my face too—I must admit, I was happy that she was concerned for me. “Are you happy, Mommy?”

“Yes. I’m glad that you’d worry about me, Flora.” I placed a hand on her head, which made her perk right up.

Still, I was quite curious to know more about this girl who had drawn the picture book. I rather wanted to meet her.

A few days after that, I happened to hear that the bear had come again.

“Bear bwrought something yummy,” Flora informed me.

So, the bear girl had brought something sweet and delicious. It must’ve been very tasty too, as Flora couldn’t stop beaming and gushing about how delightful the snacks were.

Even my husband, Forot, nodded along. “It certainly was delicious.”

So, Forot had joined her as well. I was envious they had both tried the mysterious food—and even ElleLaura had been there, they said? How cruel! Why hadn’t they called me?

When I told Forot I would also like to try this pudding food, I could see the wheels turning in his mind. I’d known him long enough to understand that look—the man was up to no good.

But to my surprise, Forot served the food called pudding at his birthday banquet. It really was delicious.

Still, I was mostly just shocked that it hadn't been made by the head chef, Zelef. This was the king's birthday banquet, after all. Nobles and all sorts of influential sorts were in attendance. We couldn't serve anything thoughtlessly. Even so, the fact that he had allowed the pudding to be served meant he trusted that bear girl.

But who she could be? My husband, the king, trusted her, and my daughter had taken a liking to her. When could I meet her?

That being said, I was a little confused—I thought the girl was an artist, not a cook.

The bear girl paid a visit a third time. Flora, Forot, and Ellelaura had all seen her, and once again, I had been the only one left out.

"The black bear and white bear were so cute," Flora told me, on the eve of the visit. "They were sooo soft!" Black and white bears? What in the world was she talking about?

It seemed rather unlikely that they were real bears, but Forot corrected me on that—the bear girl had summoned the beasts herself, and they seemed real as anything. The thought of bears wandering the castle worried me for a moment, but I trusted Forot's judgment: if he'd given permission for those summons, they couldn't have been dangerous.

But...summons? The girl had *summons*? She could draw picture books, made delicious food, and summon bears. The mystery only deepened.

I dearly wanted to meet this bear girl, so I instructed Ellelaura to let me know the next time she visited.

"She has been treating my daughter so well," I said, "I must meet her."

I would meet the bear girl next time, surely.

One day, word came that the bear girl had arrived to see Flora. I quickly headed to Flora's room, and there she was—dressed as a bear, just like my daughter had said. She wore an incredibly soft bear outfit, with bear shoes on

her feet and bear gloves on her hands.

This girl had drawn the bear picture book and had gotten permission from Forot to freely visit our daughter.

Flora seemed quite taken by the girl and kept repeating the word “bear” over and over. The girl looked upon Flora kindly as she stroked my daughter’s hair and hugged her back. Although I felt a little left out, being Flora’s mother, that was fine—what truly mattered was seeing my daughter smile.

It seemed that the girl’s name was not “bear,” but Yuna.

My daughter seemed to enjoy touching Yuna’s clothes, so I tried touching them as well. They felt simply divine, like the finest of fur pelts!

Yuna looked at me like she wanted me to stop, so I did, but she seemed quite happy to let Flora touch her clothes. I suppose one might prefer an adorable girl doing such a thing over a grown woman.

Yuna had Flora sit in a chair and then took some bread out of her bear glove. In fact, she produced a great deal of bread from the mouth of that bear glove, of all kinds, and they uniformly looked delicious. Flora reached out and started eating one. Forot was eating with her as well, so I joined in. The bread was soft, as though it were freshly baked, and it was delicious. Had she made this bread as well?

She also produced pudding, which I promptly ate with a spoon. Oh, it was so divine, I could eat so much of it! If only I could’ve had a giant cup of it instead of a small one.

But Yuna warned us that it wasn’t good to eat too much of it. You know, she didn’t seem nervous at all, even though she was surrounded by royals. I understood why both my daughter and husband had taken a liking to her.

I asked ElleLaura to tell me next time the bear girl visited. I felt like I had more things to look forward to.

Chapter 28:

Ogul of the Cheese Village

OUR VILLAGE COULD HARDLY be called affluent. We were scraping by to survive. Monsters began to appear nearby and attack our precious livestock. We had no money to hire an adventurer, even all together as a village. We began to sell the cheese we cultivated in the royal capital, but it seemed most people found the cheeses too unfamiliar to be worth buying. Then, as we were trying to sell our cheeses, someone bought our entire stock. According to my pops, it was a girl dressed up as a bear.

We were saved by a girl in a *bear costume*.

I was dubious about it, but he showed me the money. I couldn't deny it.

After submitting a monster-slaying quest at the adventurers' guild, I returned home to the village with my pops.

The adventurers never came, but...that was when the girl in the bear costume herself arrived at the village, that very girl who had bought all of our cheese. Once she found out that we were plagued by monsters, she slayed them for us.

She did it for the cheese, she said. The entire village rejoiced at that. She refused any thanks and even let us have the monsters' mana gems. I'd just thought she was just an oddly dressed girl at first, but she was the village's savior.

"Well, Ogul, we're counting on you," said my father, the head of the village. And so I set off to Crimonia in order to sell our cheese to the girl in the bear clothes. She'd asked us to regularly bring it to a place called the Bear's Lounge in Crimonia.

She'd also given us an item bag to make the job easier. Thanks to that, I didn't need a carriage and could manage with just a horse, which made things much

simpler.

I was dubious when she told me that she was making meals using the cheese, but at least she was buying it from our village. That money could fund all the necessities our once-impoverished village needed.

Once I arrived at Crimonia, I secured myself an inn right away. With a room in my name and my horse in safe hands, I got directions to the Bear's Lounge that the girl had described...though the fact that there was really a shop called "the Bear's Lounge" seemed absurd. Still, someone gave me directions right away.

There was a large bear statue in front of it, apparently, which would make it easy to spot. I headed to the shop immediately. There, I found a large, imposing building.

This had to be it, right? Just as I'd heard at the inn, there was indeed a gigantic bear in front of the building. But it wasn't like any bear I'd seen before. It was much, *much* cuter, and the adorable bear was even holding some bread.

I suppose this had to be the place.

When I headed inside, I found many patrons dining there. Even meals made using the cheese from our very village were on the tables. Everyone seemed to enjoy their food. They were eating so much of our cheese—the very cheese that we hadn't been able to sell at the capital. I couldn't believe it.

There were little kids dressed as bears cleaning off the tabletops. I stopped one of the girls who seemed to be affiliated with the establishment.

"Excuse me," I said to her, "I'm looking for the person in charge."

The girl looked surprised. "Ah, please wait one moment," she said, and left for a moment. She immediately came back with another girl, one that wasn't wearing a bear outfit.

"Um, what can we do for you?" she asked.

"I brought some cheese, but I'm not entirely sure what to do with it. I was told to meet either Morin or Tiermina."

"Oh, one moment please. Actually, could you come over this way?" She

brought me to a room in the back of the establishment. “Would you please wait here for a moment? The store is just so busy. Mom—I mean, Morin—isn’t available just this moment.”

“Sure.”

“Oh, what will we do? Tiermina isn’t here. Maybe I can have someone go get her...”

“You don’t need to hurry for me,” I told her.

“I’m sorry.”

I’d seen how busy they were earlier. Perhaps I should have come at a different time...

“Is the girl in the bear getup here?” I asked. “I don’t mean one of the little ones in the shop. She’s, well, short? And she rides a real bear,” I said, recalling the girl who had shown up at the village.

“You mean Yuna. She doesn’t come here much except to eat breakfast and lunch. Oh, I’ll bring something to drink, so please have a seat.”

“No, no, please don’t mind me.”

The girl left the room in a hurry.

It was an odd feeling—here the shop was, real as anything, and people were actually eating our cheese. I was worried that the shop wouldn’t buy any more at first, but I suppose I hadn’t had anything to worry about at all.

After a short wait, the girl from earlier came back. She wasn’t alone, either—an adult woman was with her.

“I’m sorry,” she said as she stepped inside, “I hope you weren’t waiting long.” The girl from earlier set out some drinks, and the woman continued. “I’m Tiermina. I manage this shop.”

“My name is Ogul. I brought cheese that the girl in the bear clothes requested.”

“Thank you. We were about to run out, so this is such a help.”

“And you’re serious about buying it, are you?” I had to check, just in case.

“Yes, of course,” the woman replied. “Yuna told me about it. Would you be fine with the same payment as last time?”

“Yes, that’s not an issue at all.”

The deal was going smoothly. They truly were buying the cheese. I’d be able to buy necessities before going home to the village.

“So...I have something small to ask,” the woman said, seeming a bit uncomfortable. It didn’t seem like the negotiation was falling through, but I really hoped she wouldn’t try to haggle me down. We’d already budgeted what to buy using the profits. But she said something entirely different. “Would it be possible for you to make more cheese?”

“*More* of it?” I asked.

“I’m sure you can tell already from the dining room—the meals that require cheese are very popular. I’m not sure how much time and work it takes to make cheese, but could you increase production?”

We had a stockpile of cheese. It *was* possible if the village ate less of it—and we were making more right now, too.

“Was that unreasonable to ask?” she said.

“I think we could make a little more.”

“Really? That would be such a help.” She looked happy.

“Oh, it’s fine,” I said. “You’re actually helping our village.”

The more they bought, the better it would be for us. Once I got home, I’d have to tell the village to increase production.

“Well then,” she said, “I suppose I just have to check on the cheese you brought and pay you.”

“Yep, that’s about it.”

They led me to their storage, but first took me through the kitchen along the way. The woman introduced me to Morin there, who was in the middle of baking bread.

“I’m sorry,” she said as she rushed around the kitchen. “I just can’t seem to

find a spare moment.”

“I see that you have the children working as well,” I said. Like on the floor of the shop, there were a lot of kids working in the kitchen.

“They’re all orphans, you see. Yuna looks after them.”

“You mean the bear girl. Just who is she?”

“Hrmmm,” Morin paused. “That’s the hardest question anyone could ever think to ask.”

“It’s all right if you can’t tell me.”

“That’s not it. You see, it’s just that...we’re not really sure either. She appears suddenly out of nowhere and saves people without asking for anything in return.”

Just like she’d done for our village. She truly was an enigmatic girl.

Once they brought me to the storage, I began to line their shelves with the cheese from the item bag.

“Thank you,” said the woman.

I shook my head. “Don’t mention it. I do this all the time.”

The woman counted the blocks of cheese I’d put on the shelves. “Oh? I think there’s a slight surplus.”

“My father—I mean, um, the village chief—told me to bring more than needed.”

“Then we’ll need to pay you more as well.”

“Well...” The cheese was a thank-you for the girl for saving our village. It wasn’t like there was much more we could do for her.

“No, we really must,” the woman said. “If we let this slip by once, it could easily happen a second or third time. That won’t do for either of us. We’re entering into a long partnership, after all.”

Just like that, then, she calculated everything out. I didn’t get the chance to

tell her the cheese had been a thank-you gift.

“Can you confirm this here?” she asked. “This is the price of a single block and right here is the number of blocks you brought. And that’s the total amount.”

After I checked for myself, we returned to the room we had been in earlier.

“Well then,” she said, “here’s your payment.”

“Thank you.” I took the pouch of money, then I borrowed a table and counted it. It was quite a hefty sum. Yes, I’d be able to buy whatever the village needed with this. I really couldn’t express just how grateful I was.

“We’re looking forward to working with you again,” she said.

I nodded. “Yes, we’re counting on it.” I bought what we needed for the village using the money and headed home. I really needed to thank the bear girl.

Chapter 29:

Choosing Fina's Dress

IT WAS A STATE OF EMERGENCY—I've been trapped in a room. The door wasn't locked, but I couldn't escape or call for help. My captor? It was Lady Noa, the daughter of the town's lordship.

Lady Noa and Ms. Lala (a servant at the estate) stood in front of me, scrutinizing dresses on hangers. They had all sorts of dresses in many pretty colors. Who was going to wear those? They had to be choosing Lady Noa's dress. They *had* to be. But that clashed with what they were actually saying...

"I wonder what color Fina would look good in?"

"How about this color for Miss Fina?"

"Don't you find it a tad bright?"

"Do you think so? In that case, maybe this?"

"Maybe, maybe. But I think this would look good as well."

The only thing they were talking about was which dresses would look good on *me*. How did this happen? It all started when I got the invitation to Lady Misa's birthday party. I had no idea what to do, so I asked Yuna for help. Yuna didn't seem to know either, so we went to Lady Noa.

At first, I planned to just say I couldn't go, but Lady Noa convinced me to attend. Just thinking about it bummed me out.

Lady Noa had grabbed my arm and said, "Let's go decide which dress to wear to the birthday party." She'd dragged me to her room, and...now, here I was.

Oh, I just wanted to go home, but I couldn't just leave. Perhaps she'd let me say no the dresses?

"I think this one might be better." Lady Noa spread out a dress to show it off to Ms. Lala.

No, a pretty dress like that would never look good on someone like me. I could hardly believe it... Could I really not wear normal clothes? Could I still say I wasn't going? It made my stomach hurt. I felt like this had happened to me before. Yeah, I knew this stomachache.

"In that case," said Ms. Lala, "let's have her try them all on and pick out the one that looks best on her."

"You're right," Lady Noa replied. "We have time. Fina can put them all on."

Then they picked up the dresses and started closing in on me. I backed away.

Oh, right... Now I remembered why this was so familiar. This exact thing had happened to me at the capital. Lady Ellelaura and Ms. Surilina had made me wear clothes, just like this. Lady Noa had the same look that Lady Ellelaura had when she was coming toward me with the fancy clothes. Honestly, why did they always want me to wear their nice things?! A dress like that would never look good on me. It would be such a waste.

"Lady Noa, can't I wear my normal clothes to the party?" Even though I knew it was useless, I still tried to stop it. All the dresses here were way more expensive than anything in my wardrobe. Actually, they were probably even *more* expensive than the clothes Lady Ellelaura forced me to wear. If I got them dirty or tore them, it would be a disaster. I'd never be able to repay her.

"I think that Misa will wear a fancy dress," said Lady Noa. "I'm certainly going to be wearing one too. You *have* to, Fina."

I couldn't find the words to reply.

"Well then, Fina," said Lady Noa, drawing ever closer. "Hurry up and get out of those."

"Lady Noa..." I backed away to try to escape, but the bed was in the way and I couldn't get any farther. It was almost exactly the same as what had happened with Lady Ellelaura.

Lady Noa and Ms. Lala drew still closer.

"A formal dress wouldn't look good on me!" I insisted.

"You're adorable, Miss Fina," said Ms. Lala. "Any dress would look lovely on

you.”

“I wholeheartedly agree with Lala. Now, we’ll choose the best one for you from all of these.”

They were saying the exact same things that Ms. Surilina and Lady ElleLaura had said...but this time I wasn’t alone. Yuna was with me.

“In that case,” I said, “Yuna should also...”

“Miss Yuna?” Ms. Lala repeated. “Oh, she left while we were preparing the dresses.”

“What?!”

She nodded. “Yuna has entrusted your well-being to Lord Cliff.”

Yunaaaaaa!!! I yelled in my head. Ugh, I couldn’t believe she left without me. I wanted to go home too!

“Lala, please help Fina with her clothes.”

“As you wish.”

Ms. Lala started coming toward me. I had nowhere to run. Not even Yuna was there to save me.

“Miss Fina, please excuse me.” Ms. Lala reached toward me.

“Oh, fine,” I groaned, defeated. “I’ll take off my own clothes, thanks.”

Like I’d learned at Lady ElleLaura’s house, giving up was a fundamental part of life. You can’t fight fashion-crazy nobles. I gave up, undressed, and then started trying on dresses. The clothes I’d worn at Lady ElleLaura’s house were pretty cute, I admit. When I wore them, I felt like I was a princess.

“It fits you perfectly,” noted Ms. Lala. “We may not need to tailor it.”

Oh, so I was trying on Lady Noa’s dresses? Lady Noa and I were the same age and about the same height, so that made sense.

“Fina, give us a turn,” Lady Noa told me, so I twirled slowly around.

“It looks good on you, Fina.”

Ugh! So embarrassing.

“In that case, try this one on next.” Smiling, Lady Noa handed another dress to me. Saying no wasn’t an option, so I ended up trying on that dress too. All of the dresses were beautiful, and every single one of them felt like they were wasted on me.

After the second one, they had me try on even *more* dresses.

“Fina, did you like any of them?” asked Lady Noa.

They were all beautiful, so I had trouble deciding on one I liked best. The less flashy colors were better, I thought. When I told her that, Lady Noa picked out one of those dresses for me.

Finally, we were done picking out a dress. Still, just thinking of wearing it to Lady Misa’s party gave me a stomachache.

“Well then, since we have Fina’s dress now, let’s pick out Yuna’s next,” said Lady Noa as Ms. Lala helped me take off the dress.

“Then maybe Yuna should’ve stuck around?” I wondered.

“No, that wouldn’t work,” said Lady Noa. “If we told Yuna to wear one, she never would.”

Yuna always wore her bear clothes. I’d never seen her take them off except in the bath. I’d even asked her if she ever wore other clothes. She just said that she’d been blessed by bears and wasn’t supposed to take them off. A bear blessing, though... Was that really a thing?

“Also, if we told her she had to wear it, she probably wouldn’t go to the birthday party,” Lady Noa continued. “That’s why we need to keep this a secret until the day of. You can’t tell Yuna a word of it, Fina.”

So that was why Lady Noa hadn’t asked Yuna to help with picking dresses. Unlike me, Yuna *could* say no, even to nobles. She was very clear about things she didn’t want. It seemed Lady Noa understood that.

“Let’s pick out Yuna’s dress together, Fina,” said Lady Noa.

“Yes,” I said. “Let’s.” It was Yuna’s own fault, and I was still rather peeved about her ditching me. With that, we started to go through dresses to find one for Yuna.

Chapter 30:

Sherry Makes Stuffed Animals

THE SHOP THAT I work in deals with fabric and thread. We make clothes there. One day, Yuna came by. She asked me about making stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

Kumayuru and Kumakyu are the names of Yuna's bears. They are very cute and good bears. Apparently, she wanted me to make stuffed animals of them.

I wanted to make sure I did a great job, so I asked her if she could show me her bears. Since the room we were in was small, I thought she wouldn't be able to, but Yuna stuck out her arm and a little Kumayuru came out of her bear hand.

Wh-what is this?! What is this tiny little bear?! I thought. It was very, very cute. A small Kumayuru...

A small Kumayuru?! I looked at the bear, totally shocked. Yuna told me that she wanted a stuffed animal the size of this Kumayuru to be made.

I brought out the tape measure and measured Kumayuru. I took Kumayuru's measurements all over, including Kumayuru's head, body, legs, paws, ears, and tail.

The bear was so very fluffy and soft.

Oof, it was so very cute.

I got permission from Temoka, the owner of the shop, and started making the stuffed animals right away.

I learned how to make things that I didn't understand from Temoka and made the pattern for the stuffed animal. That part was the hardest. After that, I cut out the cloth from the patterns, and sewed them together to finish up the

stuffed animal. It was a little like making clothes.

“Sherry, I think that’s it for today,” said Mr. Temoka.

“Thank you very much, Mr. Temoka. I finished the difficult part thanks to you.”

“This is just part of your studies. And if there’s anything you don’t understand, make sure to let me know.”

Temoka was very kind about teaching me. Was this what it was like to have a father?

“I want to make a bit more progress at home. Can I bring it with me?”

“I wouldn’t mind that. But don’t overdo it.”

“I won’t.”

I decided to bring the materials back with me so I could keep making the stuffed animal at home.

Once I got home and had dinner, I started making the stuffed animals again.

“Sherry, whatcha making?” Minsha asked me. Minsha is a little girl.

“It’s a bear stuffed animal.”

“A bear?!” Bears are dangerous creatures. But thanks to Yuna’s bears, everyone perked up just hearing about them. I was a little worried about what would happen to them...

“Yuna asked me to make stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu.”

“That’s so nice. I want one too.”

“Hmm... Would you like me to ask Yuna if I can make you one?”

“Are you sure?”

“But only after checking in with Yuna, okay?”

“Okay!”

After everyone went to bed, I started working on the stuffed animals in the dining hall to make sure I wasn't causing trouble for the other kids I shared a room with. I was tired, but I kept going. Yuna asked me to do this. She asked because it was me. I was really happy, so I kept sewing in order to live up to Yuna's expectations.

Then, once it was almost morning, I finished the Kumayuru stuffed animal.

It was done. It was my first time making one, but it turned out great.

The most difficult part was definitely the face. I had to work really hard to make the face cute.

Once I was done with Kumayuru, I relaxed too much and fell right asleep. But then the headmistress woke me up right away and scolded me.

I went back to my room and slept.

After I slept just a little, it was breakfast time and the other kids in my room woke me right up. I rubbed my tired eyes and got up. I was tired since I'd only slept a bit, but I was making a stuffed animal until morning, so of course I'd be tired.

I looked around the room. Huh? I couldn't find the Kumayuru stuffed animal. I hadn't just dreamed finishing it, right? I remembered I'd left it in the dining hall.

I went outside, hurried to the dining room, and found the tiny little kids fighting over the stuffed animal.

"This is mine."

"It's *mine*."

"Uwghhhh! Let me hold it too."

They were fighting over the stuffed animal I made? "I made that, so could you give it back?"

When I said that to them, they all looked like they were about to cry.

"Nuh-uh."

"I want the bear."

They hugged the bear really tightly and didn't seem like they wanted to let it go. I never would have thought that anyone would want it that much.

"Yuna asked me to make it. So please give it back."

"Yuna did?"

"Uh-huh. And you all don't want to make trouble for Yuna, do you?" I said. Then the little kid with the stuffed animal looked sad. They all really liked Yuna, so they wouldn't cause trouble for her. But I felt bad for the kids.

"Thank you. I can't do it right away, but I'll ask Yuna if I can make stuffed animals for all of you."

"Really?!"

"For me too?!"

"And me?!"

Their frowns turned upside down. "Uh-huh, so just wait for now." I promised to make them all stuffed animals.

"Sherry, don't you have a Kumakyu?"

"I'm going to start making it."

"Then I want a Kumakyu one."

"I want a Kumayuru."

"I want a Kumayuru too."

"I want a Kumakyu."

Minsha also bugged me for one since I'd promised her one yesterday. I had to make a lot of stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu now.

After eating breakfast, I rubbed my eyes and headed to the shop.

"Sherry, you look tired. Are you all right?"

"Yes, I was working a little hard."

"You need to make sure you get a good night's sleep."

“Okay.”

“In that case, I’ll work, but you can come ask me about anything you’re not sure about.”

“Okay.”

I already finished Kumayuru, so now all I needed to do was use white cloth to make Kumakyu and it would be fine.

I started making Kumakyu as a stuffed animal. Before long, I started to yawn. I was sleepy. But I needed to work hard and finish it.

I was tired, but I somehow finished making the Kumakyu stuffed animal. Now all I needed to do was take it to Yuna. I got permission from Temoka to go out.

“Sherry, after you go to Yuna’s place, you can take the rest of the day off. I understand why you’re pushing yourself for Yuna, but you need to take breaks too.”

It seemed like he noticed I was tired while I was working.

“I’m sorry,” I said, and decided to take a break for today. I put away the finished Kumayuru and Kumakyu into a bag. It was a little big, but not too big for me to carry.

I carried the bag with the stuffed animals and went to Yuna’s house.

I’d be happy if she liked them...



ILLUSTRATION GALLERY



STORY

KUMAKUMA BEAR 9



YUNA GETS MAD

Yuna ends up with time to kill before she has to go back to Crimonia, so she heads to the market to find ingredients with Zelef and Botts. As she buys unfamiliar fruit en masse, she receives a call from Fina on one of the bear phones, which she had given to the young girl in the past. When she realizes Fina is in danger, Yuna hurries back to Gran's estate to find Fina and Noa unconscious...but there's no sign of Misa, who was supposed to have been with them. Once Fina and Noa come to, they tell her that Misa has been kidnapped by someone, which prompts Yuna to summon Kumayuru and Kumakyu in order to search for Misa around town. Her bears follow the trail to the Salbard estate, just as she had expected. Yuna punches the daylight out of Salbard's thickheaded son who had taken Misa hostage and rescues her. Then, just when the thickheaded father tried to make excuses for the incident and Yuna is about to give him a real pummeling, Ellelaura arrives at the estate.



KUMAYURU AND KUMAKYU AREN'T SCARY!

Ellelaura had actually been charged with a secret royal order from the king himself to look into the Salbards. She seizes proof of wrongdoings from the estate, leading to the imprisonment of the Salbard family. But because Yuna had dashed through the town on her bears in order to reach the Salbard's estate in time, the townspeople are now scared of her. With Fina and the others' help, she holds a town event and demonstrates that Kumayuru and Kumakyu aren't dangerous at all.



AN ELF GIRL ON THE BEAR HOUSE DOORSTEP?!

Upon returning to Crimonia, Yuna apologizes to Tiermina for letting Fina get hurt. A shipment of food from the land of Wa comes in, and—excited to make Japanese food for the first time in ages—Yuna she picks up her stuffed toys and heads over to Noa. From there, Yuna pays a visit to Princess Flora in the capital in order to give her the stuffed animals. While she's headed home to her bear house in the capital, she finds a young elf girl named Luimin collapsed at her doorstep. Luimin is looking for her older sister, Sanya. Yuna knows Sanya as the guild master of the adventurers' guild, so they head there together. After the sisters decide to return to the elves' village, Yuna gets permission to come along. The group stops by the town of Laluz on the way and works to get back an important bracelet that Luimin had lost. After recovering the bracelet, they head for the elves' village once again.

Story:

Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear 9

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Chapter 31:

The Bear Fan Club's Tea Party

Fina's Chronicles

LADY MISA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY went off without any issues. I had to wear a dress, but I felt a little better because Yuna wore one too. She'd fought it as hard as she could, but Lady Noa won and Yuna said yes to the dress.

Yuna had looked unhappy with me, but I couldn't just wear a dress all on my own—no, she had to wear one with me. Besides, she looked really pretty in the dress. Even Lady Ellelaura and Lord Cliff had been surprised. It was beautiful, and I didn't understand why she hated it so much.

Lady Misa was very happy with the cake and bear stuffed animals we gave her as presents. We finished the party and I hadn't gotten the dress dirty at all.

"Would you like to have a tea party tomorrow?" Lady Misa asked that night, after the event was over.

"A tea party?"

"The flowers blooming in the garden right now look so beautiful."

Lady Misa sometimes helped with the flowers, she said, and that's why she wanted us to see them. Looking at a large garden while drinking tea really did sound like something an aristocrat would do, and Lady Misa and Lady Noa *were* aristocrats...but I was the only one who wasn't.

"Tea in the garden? That sounds lovely," Lady Noa agreed. I didn't have a reason *not* to go to the tea party, so we both agreed to come along.

"What about you, Yuna?" Lady Misa asked.

"Umm, I think I'm good," she said. "You three enjoy yourselves, okay?"

"Come on, you should join us at the tea party," Lady Noa insisted.

"Right now, I'd like to take a nice leisurely walk alone through the town."

Even after we'd directly invited her, Yuna said no. Lady Noa and Lady Misa

seemed a little disappointed, but they didn't keep begging her to go.

The next day, the three of us went to the garden. There were lots of pretty flowers blooming there...but then again, it wasn't surprising that they were pretty. They were the flowers at Lady Misa's house, after all, and they could even match the beauty of the flowers I'd seen at the castle.

Tea lined the table, along with some cakes that Yuna had prepared for us. Overeating was supposed to be bad, though... Was it okay to eat this much? We'd eaten a whole lot yesterday too.

The Kumayuru and Kumakyu stuffed animals sat next to the cakes. Lady Noa had asked Lady Misa to bring them—Lady Noa had been looking jealously at the stuffed animals the whole time. I hoped she wouldn't take them from Lady Misa.

"If there is anything more you need, please call me," said Ms. Meishun, who had prepared the tea for us. With that, she left us to our three-person tea party.

"Well then, shall we?" I dug into my cake, looking out at the flowers as I did so.

"Fina, thank you so much for coming to the party," Misa said.

"Not at all, um..." I couldn't tell her that I'd actually wanted to say no.

But Lady Noa told her my secret right away. "Fina was going to turn you down at first."

"Was she really?!" Lady Misa looked surprised, but...it was true. Still, why did Lady Noa tell her?

"I'm sorry," I said. "I thought I would be in the way if I went to a noble's birthday party."

"But aren't we friends?" said Lady Misa. "It doesn't matter whether you're a noble or not."

I looked at my feet. "Lady Misa..."

Lady Misa gave me a serious look.

“That’s right,” said Lady Noa. “You’re worrying too much, Fina. We’re not worried about it. You’re our friend. More importantly, we’re connected because of the bear fan club.” She picked up the Kumayuru plush as she spoke.

“Lady Noa...” It was all too much.

“Just come to my house anytime you’d like to spend time together,” said Lady Noa.

“Oh, Noa,” Lady Misa said. “That’s no fair. I want her to come to my house too. Fina, you can come visit the town anytime you’d like. We’ll welcome you back.”

But it wasn’t like I could reach Lady Misa’s town too easily. Maybe if I asked Yuna to help me...?

“Yuna was planning on turning down your invitation too,” said Lady Noa, puffing her chest proudly. “I made sure she came. Also, I was the one who chose Fina’s and Yuna’s dresses.”

“Yuna looked very pretty in her dress,” I said. Yuna had looked so beautiful in her dress, but I didn’t think my own looked good on me.

Ugh, even thinking about it made me feel self-conscious.

After that, I talked with Lady Misa and Lady Noa about the party.

When Lady Noa finished her cake, she suddenly stood up. “Well then, it’s time for a bear fan club meeting,” she proclaimed.

“A meeting?” I repeated.

“That’s right!”

“Noa,” said Lady Misa, “what do we *do* at a fan club meeting?”

“Why, we talk about bears, of course!”

But...we didn’t really have many bears to talk about other than Yuna, Kumayuru, and Kumakyu.

“First,” said Lady Noa, pointing at me, “I have a question for our traitor, Fina.”

“I’m a traitor now?!”

“That’s right. Why didn’t you tell me about the bear stuffed animals? If you’d told me, then maybe I would have gotten—*um*, I mean, maybe I would’ve helped make them too.”

Lady Noa turned her eyes toward the bear stuffed animals on the table. So *that* was why she’d wanted to bring them...although it sounded a lot like she wanted some of her own.

“You neglected your duty to tell me,” she continued. “I’m the president of the bear fan club.”

What was I supposed to say to that? “That’s, um... That’s because they were Lady Misa’s birthday present from me and Yuna. And we were so busy making them...” I was so worried about the presents back then that I hadn’t even considered that Lady Noa would be upset.

“Guh, I wish I could have helped make the stuffed animals too,” she said.

“Um... I’m sorry,” I said and looked down, which made Lady Noa panic.

“I forgive you, okay? Just invite me to help next time, please.”

“Okay.”

“And I’d like bear stuffed animals of my own soon.” Lady Noa hugged the Kumayuru stuffed animal tightly. She really wanted one of them, didn’t she? “They look so much like Kumayuru and Kumakyu, though.”

Lady Noa looked down at the Kumayuru’s face. Sherry had said she’d put a lot of work into them. If she hadn’t taught me, I never would’ve been able to make them as well as I did.

“Oh, I know!” said Lady Noa. “You can make giant Kumayuru and Kumakyu stuffed animals for my birthday!” She clapped her hands as though she’d just had a breakthrough.

“That’s so unfair, Noa,” Lady Misa said. “I want giant stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu too.”

Lady Noa giggled. “I would be the best person to get giant bear stuffed animals.”

I tried to imagine making giant bears. Uhhh... It seemed like they'd be really hard to make. Even making small bears like these had been a lot of work. If I had to make bigger ones, they'd probably take a lot of fabric and cotton. Probably even more than ten of these smaller ones.

But making the stuffed animals had been fun. If we would make big versions of Kumayuru and Kumakyu, I'd be willing to try.

Chapter 32:

Ange and the Bear Stuffed Animals

RECENTLY, YUNA—a girl who dresses as a bear—has been frequenting the castle. She even received permission from His Majesty to enter the room of the princess, Lady Flora, as much as she pleased. Ms. Yuna was truly a curious girl.

Yuna was incredibly skilled at drawing and made illustrated books for Lady Flora. She could also cook, and she fixed all sorts of meals for Lady Flora. Most unbelievable of all was that she was an amazing adventurer, even if she just seemed like an adorable girl.

Today, Ms. Yuna had come to see Lady Flora, wearing the same charming bear clothes as always. Anytime Ms. Yuna pays a visit, Lady Flora runs to her side talking about bear this and bear that. When Lady Flora ran up this time, Ms. Yuna took her up into a kindly hug and Lady Flora broke out into a full smile.

Ms. Yuna told Lady Flora she brought a present. Was it the usual fare, I wondered? But no—instead, Ms. Yuna produced bear stuffed animals from the bear-face gloves she wore on her hand. She had two of them: one white and one black. They looked exactly like the bears that Ms. Yuna could summon.

Lady Flora happily hugged the stuffed animals and sat down right there on the ground. Though we cleaned the floors spick and span, such behavior was unfit for royalty and I urged her to stand up again. She did as I asked and took a seat in a chair, clutching the stuffed animal all the while.

It seemed that Ms. Yuna had modeled the stuffed animals after her bear summons, which was why they were black and white.

Lady Flora held the bear's paw as she patted it on the head and squeezed it, all smiles. Oh, how adorable! Why, my own daughter would be just as happy with such a cute little bear—she'd taken a liking to the illustrated book Ms. Yuna had drawn too, and had grown to love bears just as Lady Flora did. Lady

Flora read the bear book for a while, with her stuffed animal beside her.

Then, Her Majesty arrived. To my surprise, Ms. Yuna had even prepared stuffed animals for her. I was terribly jealous, but I couldn't show that in front of Her Majesty, let alone mention that I desired my own bears.

As I was looking at the bears, Miss Yuna spoke to me as well. "Did you want some too, Ange?" She must have noticed the covetous look I'd given them.

"No, but... Umm, it did cross my mind that my daughter might like them," I admitted. "My daughter already loves your book."

"In that case, Ange, please give this to your daughter," Miss Yuna said, then produced another pair of black and white bears.

"Are you sure?"

"You said she likes bears. I can't *not* give them to her."

I thanked Yuna and tried to take them, but Lady Flora was ecstatic to see more bears join the table.

Oh, Lady Flora... Please don't say you want these bears as well! They were supposed to be for my own daughter. But none of my worries could reach Lady Flora, who was downright jubilant. Regardless, I was happy to see her smile.

Then, we ate the food Miss Yuna had brought. Today we were having hot pot, with a rare food she'd added called "mochi." Mochi is a stretchy sort of food, and Lady Flora seemed to enjoy it.

Once we were finished with the afternoon meal, Lady Flora held the stuffed animal she had gotten from Miss Yuna. She seemed sleepy.

I took her to her bed and she brought her stuffed animal with her. As she held her stuffed animal, Lady Flora fell blissfully asleep. How adorable!

With that, my work for the day was done. I brought home the stuffed animals I had gotten from Miss Yuna without incident. I was so thankful Lady Flora hadn't wanted the bears meant for my daughter, though later she was quite

forlorn to find that Miss Yuna had left while she slept.

My quarters were on the castle grounds, and I lived there with my husband and child. As my husband works a clerical job at the castle, we were both allowed to live there together. This made it easy for me to check on my daughter when I had a free moment. The other servants watched over her as well, so I could work without worry.

When I arrived back home, my daughter Lecia greeted me. "Welcome home, Mommy."

"I'm home," I said.

"Did the bear weally come today?"

"Oh, you're quick to pick up on gossip."

"Uh-huh, someone told me." Perhaps it had been one of the other servants. "Mommy, what's in that big bag?"

That was where I'd put the stuffed animals from Miss Yuna. "Ha ha ha! What do you think it could be? Why don't you guess, Lecia? I think you'll be very happy."

"Umm, I dunno!" Lecia pouted slightly.

I laughed again. "Mommy's sorry. You see, it's a present from the bear." I produced the stuffed animals from the bag and set them in front of my daughter.

"Bears!" Lecia's face lit up and she smiled wide as she grasped the stuffed animals. She acted exactly the same way that Lady Flora had. She'd lit up when I'd come back home, but now she was even happier...which made me a little bit jealous, perhaps, but I could understand. The bears were very cute, after all.

"Mommy, are both bears mine?"

"Mm-hmm! When I told her that you love bears, she wanted to give them to you as a present."

"I wanna meet the bear."

Though we were all allowed to live in the castle together, I was not allowed to bring my daughter into the inner grounds where the royal family resided. Lecia could only see the bear if we happened to come across her in the halls.

Maybe if I asked her, she would come meet my daughter the next time she was here? At the same time, I found it difficult to make such personal requests.

“Do the bears have names?”

“Names?”

“Uh-huh! It’d be sad if they don’t have names.”

Miss Yuna’s bears did have names. I believe the black one was called Kumayuru, and the white was Kumakyu. I let Lecia know.

“Nice to meet you, Kumayuru, Kumakyu.” Lecia gave the two bears a nice hug. When I saw her do that, I couldn’t help but break into a smile. Though Lady Flora was cute, my daughter was true competition for her. Just looking at how adorable she was made me consider having another kid.

After that, my husband arrived home and Lecia rushed over to show off her stuffed animals. She looked overjoyed.

When we ate, she set them by her side and even slept with them.

“Which bear do you think is cuter?” I asked, since I had some suspicions of what she might say.

Then, Lecia eyed her bears. She took a good look at the black one, then the white, then the black, and then the white again, repeating that several times.

“Ugh...” She looked like she was about to cry.

“I’m sorry,” I said, giving her an apologetic pat on the head. “I know they’re both very cute.”

Little Lecia clutched both the bears close.

When it was finally time to tuck her in, she was in her bed with her bears on either side of her.

“Mommy, pwease read the bear book.”

It seemed that seeing the stuffed animals had also made her want to read the

bear book.

“All right.” While I was reading the book to her, I caught the sound of her gently snoring. She had fallen asleep holding the white bear in her arms.

Oh? I suppose that must’ve been her favorite then.

“Bear...” she mumbled.

I chuckled, stroked her hair, turned off the lights, and left her room.

Chapter 33:

Retbelle Searches for the Picture Book

I AM A MERCHANT with a large establishment in the town of Laluz, and I've been quite successful. Why, I even have my own branch in the capital. I buy stock from the countries of Solzonark and Elfanica and ship them across the border.

For this trip, I would be heading to the capital to consult on several business matters. My son's wife, Seffle, lived in the capital, so I set upon bringing her and my grandchild, Alka, along. Seffle's parents had a small home, but they always showed us hospitality.

"Thank you very much."

I had been asked for a work of art made by a Solzonarkian painter. We didn't have those types of things at my main branch, though we did receive such requests from regulars on occasion. I'd often have to procure such products from my colleagues instead. This time, I planned to ask for a painting from one of the merchants I knew.

I finished up my business for the day and returned to the abode of Seffle's parents.

Darling Alka was there to greet me. "Welcome back, Grandpapa."

"Thank you." I took her in a grand hug. She was still so light. Holding her, I headed inside.

"Grandpapa," she said, "can I ask you for something?" She was rarely one to ask for anything, likely because her mother, Seffle, had done such a thorough job of teaching her manners. My darling girl rarely threw fits, and so I was quite happy to hear any request from her.

"And what is it you'd like?"

"I want the bear pik-ture book," she said.

What an adorable request. But whenever I bought Alka trinkets, Seffle denounced me for being too doting. Seffle was in the room with us, so I decided to run it by her.

“May I give one to her? It’s just a picture book, after all.”

“It’s not just a picture book,” she said. “It seems the book Alka wants isn’t sold at any shops.” So the issue wasn’t the buying so much as finding someone who was selling.

“Where did you see this book?” I asked. She told me that she’d seen a bear book while at a friend’s house and taken a keen interest in it. “And you really want this book, Alka?”

“Uh-huh! The bear is weally cute!”

“I see. If your mother allows it, then I shall find it for you.”

“Weally?” My grandchild broke into a delighted smile. I would do anything for that smile.

“Are you sure you want to make that promise so lightly?” asked Seffle.

“It’s just a book, and I am a merchant. How much trouble could it be?” At the time, I’d thought I could easily use my merchant connections to obtain the book.

First, in order to see the book in question, I went to ask Seffle’s acquaintance some questions.

“This is the book,” the friend said.

“If you’ll excuse me...” I took a look at the book. The bear in the book was indeed adorable. The book concerned a bear and a girl. In fact, my investigations revealed that the author was named Bear. When I inspected the book more closely, I found the national seal impressed in the back of it.

The book was in some way related to the national government. But...why would that be the case for a mere picture book?

“Where did you obtain this?” I asked.

“I’m very sorry. Information about the book is highly classified, so I can’t talk about it,” he said, just as Seffle had said the same the day before. Well, it seemed like I truly would not be obtaining any further information about the book.

But...it was simply a picture book, wasn’t it? Not contraband or some such thing. Why were they not able to tell me the source of the book?

“May I ask why you cannot answer questions about it?”

“When I purchased it, I entered into a contract not to breathe a word about the book. I cannot transfer, reproduce, or sell this book. I must keep the place I obtained the book secret as well.”

“You must be joking!”

The man shook his head. “If they find out I broke my end of the agreement, they might not let me buy the next volumes of the book. My kids would be so upset at me if I let that happen.”

There were already two bear books, so he was anticipating a third.

“Well then, who is this Bear that seems to be the author? I will go to them directly, so please at least tell me who they are.”

“I’m very sorry. I can’t tell you that either.”

The man became even more tightlipped at the mention of the author, as if there was a gag order. Seffle had asked me not to push too hard, so I refrained from pressing to solve the mystery.

From there, I attempted to ask others I knew with young children, and I did manage to find several people who owned the book. But just like Seffle’s acquaintance, they all were just as unwilling to tell me anything. Unsurprisingly, they wouldn’t tell me how to buy the book—that might require them to tell me where *they* got it. If I could only find out who had authored the book, I would have been able to ask them to just give me a copy or draw another, but I couldn’t even obtain that information.

“I am willing to pay,” I’d say, “so won’t you please just give it to me?”

“Deepest apologies. It’s not about the money.”

Not a single person would let me buy their book, even after I offered a hundred times the price of a normal picture book. It seemed to have something to do with the national seal impressed in the books. If that was true, someone high up in the nation had likely issued it.

After that, I continued with my work, but I continued my investigation on the side. Time marched on, though, and I still found myself without a copy. Before long, I was to leave for the capital the next day, and without fulfilling my promise to Alka.

With heavy feet, I went home to where Alka was waiting.

“Grandpapa, where is the pik-ture book?” she asked as soon as I arrived.

“I’m sorry.”

“Wuh...” she whined. She looked miserable.

“Your grandfather did all he could to find it,” said Seffle, attempting to placate her. “No need to look like that.”

Alka nodded demurely. “Uh-huh...” What a good girl. Still, I had been wrong to lift her hopes up by thoughtlessly promising the book to her.

“I’m sorry Alka,” I said again. Although I’d asked for help from my friends in the capital, I doubted they would come through. Was there a way to purchase the book?

When I returned to Laluz, I asked Doglud, another merchant, for the painting that had been requested from me in the capital. Doglud knew his art well, dealing as he did with both paintings and sculptures.

“All right, a painting from the acclaimed...Schubert, was it?”

“I’m relying on you to come through,” I said. “Please make sure you bring it on the agreed-upon day.”

“Why, it’s perfect timing.”

“How’s that?”

“I’m planning to go to the capital tomorrow, so I won’t be in town for a while. Of course, I’ll arrange for the painting before I go and make sure that’s settled.”

“You’re headed to the capital, you say?”

Because Doglud knew his art so very well, he was acquainted with many artists...which meant he might know the author of the bear picture book. It had occurred to me that Doglud might be able to find the author through his artist connections.

“If you’re headed to the capital,” I said, “may I make a request?”

“What did you have in mind?” Doglud asked, and so I explained the matter of the bear book. “A bear picture book? All right. I do have several acquaintances there, so I’ll be sure to ask around.”

“Much obliged.”

“But please don’t get your hopes up,” he added. “I highly doubt I would be able to find something you weren’t.”

“Maybe you could take an unconventional approach,” I offered. “You see, this is my last try.”

I just needed a little more information. In the meantime, I’d consider to do if I wasn’t able to find the book. Surely there was some present, even a small present, that I could find for Alka in place of the book...

Chapter 34:

Miranda and Luimin's Encounter

THERE'S A LARGE RIVER in the town of Laluz that acts as the border between Elfanica and Solzonark. The river is bordered on either side by towns. We had come to the town on Solzonark's side for a job. Once the gig was over, we decided to head back to the town in Elfanica, where we'd rented out a house.

After we finished reporting back to the Adventurer Guild, we checked out the quest board and found a gig across the water to help carry some goods. The client was going to pay the ferry fare, and it was an urgent job they needed done within a day.

We'd save on the ferry—two birds with one stone. Our party of adventurers weren't exactly rolling in dough, so we took up the gig. After I finished getting the work settled at the front desk, I went back to my buddies Sharla and Eriel.

"How'd it go?"

Eriel was looking over at the quest board. "Saw a cute girl."

A fifteen-year-old girl was ogling the quest board, and Eriel was watching her.

"You better not try jumping her or something."

"I wouldn't dare. But I mean, *look* at her! She's a damsel in distress! How could I turn a blind eye when she's looking at those quest boards all on her lonesome?"

"I suppose you have a point..."

"I'm going to talk to her really quick!" Eriel said, then headed over to the girl in question. Sharla and I gave up and followed after her.

We discovered that the girl was an elf.

She was apparently trying to get to the capital in order to see her sister, but she didn't have money to get on the ferry or even to stay at an inn. She'd come searching for a quest at the Adventurer Guild, but none of the quests seemed

like things she could do. She was in a real fix.

We couldn't just abandon her after hearing her story. Eriel and Sharla agreed.

"In that case, why don't you join us?" I asked the girl. "We're transporting some goods as part of our job."

"Can I really...?" the girl asked hesitantly.

"They'll pay for the ferry fare. It won't be much money, but it'll be enough to help you get to the capital," I said. She thought it over; maybe we looked kinda sketchy.

She looked at us, then bowed her head slightly. "As long as I'm not in the way, I'd like to take you up on that."

"Glad to hear it. We're looking forward to working with you too. I'm Miranda. And this is—"

"It's Eriel!!!"

"Call me Sharla."

"I'm Luimin."

We exchanged introductions. "So, Luimin, do you have a guild card?"

"Yes, my dad had me get one."

We looked at her guild card. She was in rank E.

Once we finished getting registered, we headed to the client's shop.

The gig was to transport the goods from the branch shop over the river to the main establishment.

Normally they'd use item bags, but those weren't available today. Since some of the items were pretty urgently needed, they'd gotten assistance from adventurers.

The client was the merchant Mr. Doglud. He seemed rather nice. "Thank you everyone," he said. "I'm so thankful you could come on such short notice for this quest."

“No need to thank us. We were about to head back to the town ourselves, so this worked out well.”

“Well, if you could move the merchandise into the carriages...?”

We followed Doglud’s orders and carried the goods to the carriage.

“They are all expensive items, so please handle them carefully.”

That’s why the quest had been limited to women, apparently. It wasn’t like men couldn’t handle delicate work, but these gigs tended to get listed like that anyway, “Luimin, could you carry that one?”

“Okay.”

Eriel and Luimin started carrying the goods together. I figured Luimin would be in good hands with Eriel, considering Eriel had already taken a liking to the elf.

We finished getting all the goods onto the carriage.

“Thank you. We will be going to the boat right away, so please get in.”

We got into the carriage, which headed right out to the docks. Mr. Doglud had the fare for us. We were incredibly lucky.

“Doing all right, Luimin?”

“Yes, I’m fine.” Luimin had seemed uneasy, but it didn’t *seem* like anything was wrong.

The boat slowly headed out into the river to cross over. The carriage disembarked from the ship and we headed straight into town until we got to the front of Mr. Doglud’s shop.

We needed to unload the goods this time.

“Sharla, you carry that over there.”

“It’s heavy...!”

“Come on, now. Eriel and Luimin are working hard.”

Luimin was hauling the goods as best she could, despite her small size. We

really needed to up our game too. We started putting away the goods according to Mr. Doglud's directions. That was when things went wrong.

"Ahhhhh!!!"

When I looked where the cry had come from, I found that Luimin had fallen down. "Luimin, are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I tripped." She stood up. "Uh...oh..."

"What is it?"

"..." Luimin didn't answer. She was just looking at something and quivering.

When I went up to her, I noticed the torn painting in front of her.

"Is something the matter?" Mr. Doglud made his way over now.

"The painting..." Luimin whispered.

Doglud looked at the painting grimly.

The painting Luimin had torn was *incredibly* expensive. Just hearing the price tag blew me away. We couldn't cough up that cash in a million years.

"This is quite a predicament," said Mr. Doglud. "We already had a buyer set up for this painting."

The more she heard, the paler Luimin's face got.

"Is it really that expensive?" I asked. It wasn't as though I doubted Mr. Doguld, but I still had to make sure.

"Yes, the painter is quite famous."

Just to make absolutely sure, we checked in with the Merchant Guild. It was without a doubt the work of a famous artist, and a painting that would fetch a hefty sum. We'd flubbed the quest, but we had no idea what to do about the money. Sure, we could've put the blame on Luimin, but we couldn't do that to the poor, shivering girl.

Soon enough, dinnertime came around. We decided to put off the details until the next day and headed to the house we were renting.

“Luimin, it’ll be okay.”

“I’m sorry...” Luimin had been doing nothing but apologizing this whole time.

I wanted to do something for her, but I had no idea what. For the time being, the only thing I could think of was negotiating to lower the price of the painting. Luimin still looked rather pale when we got her to bed and turned in for the night.

When we woke up the next day, Luimin was gone. We tried looking for her, but only found a letter on the table.

“I’m going to pay for the painting. Thank you all for being so kind to me.

Luimin”

I clutched the letter in my hand. “She’s *paying* for it? But she doesn’t have any money...”

Eriel started to panic. “You don’t think she’s selling her body or something, do you?!”

“No, I heard Luimin and Mr. Doglud talking yesterday,” said Sharla. “Something about a bracelet...”

“A bracelet?” When I thought back on it, Luimin had been wearing a pretty prominent one on her wrist.

“I’m pretty sure those things are really important to elves,” said Sharla. “And it’s also worth a lot, from what I’ve heard.”

“You don’t think she sold it, do you?!”

We rushed out of the room and headed for Mr. Doglud’s shop. We got there earlier than we’d intended—and Mr. Doglud was already there to receive us.

“I thought you would be coming,” he said. He led us to a back room, where the bracelet was on a table. This looked the one I’d seen Luimin wearing. “She left this here.”

I knew it. “And where’s Luimin now?”

“She’s left town.”

Eriel stood from her seat after hearing that. “We need to go after her as soon as we can!”

“Calm down, Eriel.”

“But Sharla, what’ll happen to Luimin?”

Sharla stopped Eriel from bolting out. “I’m worried too, all right? That’s why we need to think clearly.”

“Miss Luimin was very apologetic,” said Mr. Doglud. “She asked me to let you know how sorry she was if you came by.”

Eriel sighed. “Oh, Luimin...”

“And you still took the bracelet from her, Mr. Doglud?” I asked.

“No matter my own feelings on such matters, I’m a merchant. I can’t just shrug off a torn, priceless painting.”

“I suppose you have a point...” Still, it all made me sick at heart. “What are you planning on doing with the bracelet?”

“I don’t have any concrete plans.”

“In that case, we’ll buy it from you.”

“You will?”

“We won’t be able to buy it right away, but I’m sure that we’ll be able to save up enough eventually. Just promise us that you won’t sell it to anyone else, won’t you?”

Poor as we were, we had no idea how long it would take to pay him for it...but we couldn’t let Luimin suffer like this.

“You’re all fine doing that too, right?” he asked.

“I’m on the right side of history, thank you very much,” said Eriel. “The side of adorable girls!”

“Yes,” said Sharla. “It’s not as though we don’t share part of the blame.”

Everyone agreed to my proposal.

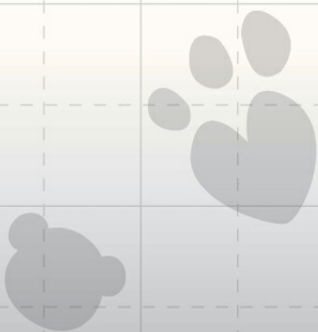
“I see how you all feel,” he said. “I’ll avoid selling it as best I can.”

We took on gigs so we could buy Luimin's bracelet back. Someday we'd give it back to her.

Then, one fateful day, we headed to the Adventurer Guild...



ILLUSTRATION GALLERY



Chapter 35:

Encounter with the Bear

The Gate Guard's Chronicles

MY JOB IS TO GUARD the town. We take turns when it comes to our duties—sometimes I'm patrolling the town, other times I keep guard over the entrance, and sometimes I'm in charge of taking care of any resident trouble that comes up near my station.

Today, I was working the gate. My primary objective (on paper) was to make sure no criminals got into the town. The job *actually* just involved watching people hold their guild and resident cards up to the crystal panel.

If it turned red, that was a problem. It meant the person in question had been registered as a criminal. But that's rarely ever happened, and...honestly? It was the most boring duty we had. Didn't matter, though—we still had to get the job done right.

"Are you really going out of town, miss?"

A little girl—about ten years old—was trying to leave, so I tried to warn her off. The adventurers liked using the local woods as a casual hunting ground for monsters, so it was pretty safe. That said, there were still monsters lurking around if you headed in too deep.

"Yeah, I'm going to go gather herbs for a little bit."

"Don't you wander too deep in the woods, even if it seems safe," I told her.

"Okay," she answered. She headed out of town, shouldering her little pack.

A couple people entered town after that, but it was so boring after that. No visitors and no leavers. This job had too many idle moments.

As I was watching the outskirts, I saw something black in the distance, walking over to me. What was that? The little girl from earlier walked beside it, making her way to the gate with somebody in a real strange getup. I gradually realized what the thing in black was. A...bear? No, it was a girl wearing a bear costume.

But why was she wearing *that*?

Uh. Anyway...

“Did you find the herbs?” I asked the girl.

“Yes.”

I’d been a little worried, but it seemed like she hadn’t run into any trouble. I asked the other girl about her bear outfit, then, but—seeming quite embarrassed—she just told me not to ask.

Hmm. She looked suspicious, but not dangerous. If she really didn’t want to talk about it, I didn’t need to ask for details as long as she wasn’t a criminal.

I asked her to present her identification, and the crystal panel would tell me whether she was a criminal, but she had no resident card or guild card. We had to use a mana check instead.

If she wasn’t registered with *that*, the crystal wouldn’t respond. Which is what I was expecting at this point, and I was right. The crystal didn’t register her, so I let her through. At the very least, I decided to report back to the captain.

Several days later, the bear girl made her way back to the gate. This time, I looked at her outfit more carefully. It was actually a pretty cute getup. A little reassuring when you looked at it, even.

I asked her where she was headed, and she told me outside the town. She had a guild card, so it seemed registering as an adventurer had worked out for her.

Anyway, I just told her to be careful and saw her off. As she walked away, I saw she had a bear tail, which wiggled to the right and left. There was a lot of detail on that thing.

I went about my work for a while after that, but the bear girl didn’t come back.

There were gates in every cardinal direction, and people didn’t always come back through the same gate, but it made me a tad anxious. Eventually, though, the bear girl came back in one piece—I hadn’t needed to worry at all. Before I even knew it, I’d given her a pat on the head.

And that made her upset. Man, I have no idea how to deal with young ladies these days...

It was another day at my station at work, and this time I started hearing rumors about a bear. On the same day she'd arrived at the adventurers' guild, the bear girl had apparently gotten caught up in a squabble with some adventurers. She even ended up fighting them. The moment I heard about that, my heart started racing. Why'd that happen?

"Then what?" I asked the guard who'd been telling me the story.

His response was completely different from what I'd expected. She fought about ten adventurers, but apparently she beat every single one of 'em. I couldn't believe it, but apparently word had gotten around that she'd even injured one. But...she really hadn't looked all that strong to me.

Every new snippet I heard about the bear girl seemed unbelievable. Word got to me that she slayed a hundred goblins, defeated a goblin king, and even took out some tigerwolves. It all seemed so impossible, but the guards with connections to the guild confirmed those stories. Still, I doubted my ears.

Then there was the least believable thing of all: she build a bear house. What *was* a bear house, even?

"A house shaped like a bear, obviously," said one of my coworkers. "You'll get it if you go see it for yourself."

So, while I was off patrolling, I headed over to get a look at the bear house. And honestly? It really *was* a bear. Yep, no bones about it. Except the bear... wasn't frightening? It was this kind of cute bear house thing.

When I'd first heard about the house, I'd thought it would be a lot more sinister, but it turned out to be just as adorable as the bear girl.

She really was just full of surprises.

Chapter 36:

Bear Cupid

Gentz's Chronicles

THE NAME'S GENTZ. I used to be an adventurer, but now I work at the adventurers' guild. The two other members of my party had married each other and retired. Perfect timing for me too, because I'd been asked if I wanted to work at the guild right around then.

At this very moment, one of their daughters was right in front of me.

"See," I explained, "you cut this like this."

"Okay," she said. She held her knife in her wee little hand as she harvested from the wolf.

Her name was Fina. She was Tiermina's girl, and one of the daughters Roy had left behind. Tiermina herself was suffering from a disease and was bedridden. We'd had a doc look at her, but the best they could do was keep the symptoms at bay with medicine.

Since her mom couldn't work, Fina had taken up the burden of providing for both her mother and her little sister. As for me, I could only arrange work for her. I'd tried to give her money in the past, but Fina had turned me down, saying she wouldn't be able to pay me back. I'd insisted that I didn't need to get the money back at all, but she wouldn't agree to it.

So I'd arranged work for her and gave her medicine along with her wages. Of course, not like I can get her work every day, especially considering she was a child, so she'd had a real dry bout recently. I wanted to help her, but I was powerless. Look at me... I can't protect Roy's cherished daughters. Can't even save Tiermina, no matter how much I care about her. I'd never felt so damn powerless.

But right around then, during the dry spell, Fina came by the guild with a girl wearing a bear costume. This girl had supposedly saved Fina from being

attacked by wolves deep in the woods.

I scolded Fina. If things had gone sideways for her, what words could I even speak over Roy's grave? And just thinking about having to tell bedridden Tiermina... No, I couldn't. I also made sure to apologize to the bear girl who'd saved Fina.

The bear girl registered as an adventurer and started bringing in monsters she'd slain. It seemed like she could hold her own despite her appearance. I thought she'd been a joke when I first saw her, but I heard she'd turned the tables on some adventurers who'd picked a fight with her. Fina seemed to like her too, so I decided not to comment on the girl's clothes.

Today, as usual, the girl brought in some monsters she'd slain. Adventurers generally harvested their own monsters, but the adventurers who couldn't be bothered brought their monsters to the guild instead. She was one of the latter types. Didn't seem like she knew *how* to harvest either. That was when I'd come up with a great idea.

I asked her to give the harvesting work over to Fina instead. That'd lower the guild's cut, of course, but I wouldn't mind a bit of trouble if it helped Fina, even just a little bit. Plus, the more time passed, the more others were realizing how exceptional the bear girl really was. The longer I waited, the harder it'd be to ask.

The girl seemed receptive to my proposal, and Fina became her exclusive harvester. She even began to travel with her. Whenever I saw Fina, she'd excitedly tell me about her adventures. On top of that, it seemed that the bear girl also gave her the wolf meat. She told me she'd started to get some nutrition in her diet and that she used her wages to buy bread and vegetables. I couldn't be more grateful to the bear girl.

The only thing was—and I only learned this after the fact—she'd brought Fina with her to go tigerwolf slaying. My heart almost stopped when I heard about that. I really wished she hadn't brought Fina with her for such a dangerous quest.

I also couldn't believe she'd handled two tigerwolves all on her own. Fina seemed excited about harvesting them, at least, so I suppose it had been good

experience.

A few days after I'd talked with Fina, she came to my house in tears. Tiermina's condition had deteriorated. Not knowing what to do, she came to me. I was glad she thought she could rely on me, but what could I even do?

I headed over to see Tiermina, but she was in so much pain that she could hardly speak. She was just so thin. She kept thanking me and apologizing and none of it was what I wanted to hear, none of it what I wanted her to tell me.

I couldn't stand it anymore, so I ran out of the house. I needed to find a doctor, but we'd already had so many doctors come to see her. Still, I headed to the doctor again...and got turned away, just as I'd expected. I was powerless. There was nothing I could do.

When I got back to Fina's house, she wasn't there. I only found her younger sister, Shuri, holding Tiermina and crying. Fina had run out right after I had.

I tried talking to Tiermina, but she was delirious and I only got vague responses. Was there really nothing I could do?! I bit my lip so hard it nearly bled. Right at the same time, Fina came back with the bear girl. Why had Fina brought her here?

When Fina came back, Tiermina came back to us as well, but she could only manage to apologize again and ask me to take care of her girls. I couldn't stop crying. Was there anything we could've done to stop the sickness before it got this bad? Had I really done all I could?

Maybe I'd just been running away from reality. Maybe all the aid I'd given the family hadn't meant a thing. I hadn't been able to save her, and all I could feel was regret. It was too late. All too late.

Then, the bear girl said something I didn't quite understand and touched Tiermina. The girl's hand glowed. The light was beautiful, like the brilliance of a high cleric—something I'd only ever heard rumors about. As she was engulfed in that light, the pain subsided from Tiermina's face. I couldn't believe the scene before me. Then, the girl chanted something that sounded like a spell.

And Tiermina...sat up.

I'd witnessed a miracle. Who would ever believe this? Tiermina was cured.

I wept. She'd saved my heart.

Then, even though she was better, Tiermina started anxiously asking about how much this would cost. She was right. Healing someone like this didn't come cheap. I suppose she hadn't wanted to talk about the fee in front of Fina and Shuri, so she sent the two off to go shopping.

Now the three of us could talk it over alone. But out of all the things I'd expected the bear girl to say, the last thing was for her to ask me to move in with Tiermina.

Tiermina and I stood there for a moment, slack-jawed. The bear girl was right. I really did love Tiermina. But that didn't have anything to do with the situation at hand.

Then the bear girl drove me into a corner with her reasoning. She talked about Fina and Shuri's welfare and who would take care of the family. Finally, she let the cat out of the bag about my feelings.

"You like her, don't you?"

Well, I couldn't deny that. I did. If I was with her, I'd be able to stay close and protect her. I felt like I was doing Roy wrong, but I started telling Tiermina my feelings anyway.

The room went silent for a short while. Tiermina flushed red. I forgot to breathe as I waited for her reply.

She thanked me, then she smiled and accepted my proclamation of love. Today was a great day.

Chapter 37:

Encounter with the Bear

Orphan Girl's Chronicles

HUNGER WOKE ME up in the morning, but it wasn't the only thing. Cold air blew in from the cracks in the walls. When I got up, the other kids got up with me.

This was an orphanage, where kids without parents end up. That included me. I don't even remember my mom or dad's faces, but I did kind of remember them hugging me. I didn't even know when I lost them. By the time I was old enough to look back, I was already in the orphanage.

We used to get food in the morning and at night, but lately, we only got dinner. When I asked the headmistress why, she just said sorry. Still, we knew that the headmistress and Liz were going out to find food for us, so we all made a promise not to complain. Liz and the headmistress were the only people to treat us kindly, after all. We didn't want them to start hating us too.

What if they abandoned us? Just thinking about it made me so scared that my whole body would shiver. But I was still hungry.

When we got up in the morning, we drank some water, though it wasn't enough to fill us up. We headed to the plaza where there were food carts to beg for food. The headmistress told us not to, but we were so hungry that we couldn't help it. The food cart owners always gave us dirty looks, but there was nothing else we could do. We'd go around picking up leftovers to eat, too hungry to care that they were other people's scraps.

I stared at the food carts and all the delicious smells came wafting over to me. When I smelled the food, my stomach started growling...not that I was the only one with a growling stomach. It was everyone.

We stared at the food carts and at the people buying food, waiting for them to throw away anything they didn't finish eating. At the very least, I wanted to make sure the kids younger than me got something to eat.

We had one promise that we made to each other: we'd never steal, not ever. One of the kids had stolen. When the headmistress and Liz found out, they went to apologize. Whenever we did anything bad, our favorite people ended up in trouble. That's why we promised to never ever do anything bad.

While I watched the food carts, I noticed a girl in weird clothes. What was that outfit? Someone said she was a...bear? She sure looked fluffy and warm.

The girl in the bear clothes looked us over, then she said something to the man at the food stall. She bought lots of skewers from the man, and they all looked so good. But that seemed like a lot of food for one person, didn't it...?

As I watched her, she came right over to us and offered us the skewers.

"Please," she said, "eat just one each."

We didn't understand what she meant at first. But she was holding skewers out right in front of our eyes.

"Can we really eat them?" I asked.

She nodded. "But it's hot, so be careful."

We all looked at each other, then reached out to take the skewers. I dug into the meat, and it tasted so good. She told us not to finish too fast, but no one was listening. We were all way too busy eating.

After we finished eating, the girl said that if we wanted more food to eat, we should take her to the orphanage. We didn't know what to do, but she was offering to feed us until we were full, so we decided to take her to the orphanage.

Everyone looked at her after she made her offer, but no one said anything.

So I decided to speak up, even though I didn't really know what to say. "Um, thank you."

"Don't worry about it," she said, then she put her hand on my head. The top of my head felt kinda warm.

Once we got to the orphanage, the bear girl looked shocked. "They live in this run-down house?" she whispered. I think she was talking to herself, but I still heard it.

While she looked at the orphanage, the headmistress came over. When she found out we went to the plaza where the food carts were, she looked a little sad and told us off. We all apologized—she told us not to, but we still went there.

The bear girl and the headmistress started talking. Apparently, the bear girl was going to give us food. They went to the kitchen, and we followed. Then the bear girl pulled out a really huge chunk of meat. She started cutting it up and cooking it with vegetables. It smelled really good! Our stomachs growled. My mouth started to water.

The headmistress told us to get to our seats and wait, and so we did. Then they started to put more food on the table than I'd ever seen before. There was even bread, not that anyone really picked that one up.

The headmistress told us to say thank you to Yuna and to eat—Yuna was apparently the bear girl's name. We said thank you to her and started eating.

It all tasted really good. The bread wasn't even hard. It was soft and so yummy. We really dug into it.

Yuna watched us for a while, then she asked the headmistress if she could look around the orphanage. With that, she left the room. I ate really fast and then followed after her—she was going outside. And...she started to seal the holes in the walls using magic! It was amazing. She filled up more and more of the holes. She went all the way around the house, then she went inside and fixed the holes there too.

"Now it probably won't be as chilly," she said and smiled. Then she looked at the small towels on our beds and looked a little sad. Right when the headmistress came in, Yuna brought out warm-looking wolf furs for every single one of us. They looked so warm. The headmistress thanked Yuna and took them.

Then we went back to the dining room where everyone had finished eating. But a hunk of meat was still left over. We decided to save it for tomorrow, so we'd be sure to have food that day.

When we told her that, Yuna pulled out a lot more meat and bread—several days' worth of it, even—and then she went home.

That night, we thanked Yuna and held the wolf furs close while we slept. When I woke up, I felt so warm. There wasn't a draft anymore, and the wolf fur was so cozy.

Then we all got breakfast ready. We were able to eat all thanks to Yuna, and we were already full even though it was only morning.

When we headed outside, we found a giant wall nearby the outside of the house. "What is that?" everyone was asking. But none of us knew.

We called the headmistress, but she didn't know what it was either. It hadn't been there yesterday. We were so scared that we went back inside. Then Yuna came over again and explained that she'd made the wall with her magic. It was amazing, but why did she make it?

She said it was there for keeping birds. The birds would lay eggs, which we would collect, and we'd clean up after the birds too. We were to do that work, she said, and we could sell the eggs to buy food.

"What would like to do?" The headmistress asked us. "Ms. Yuna is willing to give you work. If you work, then you'll be able to eat. If you don't, we'll be back to the situation we were in a few days ago. And Ms. Yuna won't be bringing any more food."

She was very direct, but she wasn't telling us that we had to do it. We looked at each other. Then one of the kids put up a hand and said very loudly, "I'll do it."

One by one, we all started to raise our hands. "I'll do it too!" I said, raising my own hand.

The headmistress looked very happy with us.

So then we started taking care of the birds. Our main jobs were to give them food and water, though we also had to clean up and collect the eggs. We were supposed to really do a good job with that cleaning too, because it'd be bad if the birds got sick. And we also had to be careful with the eggs, because they were our ticket to get some food.

The next day, we went to work in the henhouse. The birds were all very still and in a corner. When I picked up a hen, I found a white egg. Then I picked the

egg up, washed it, and put it inside a box that Yuna had prepared for us. The boxes were shaped to fit the eggs and could each hold ten of them.

Once we were done collecting the eggs, we let the birds go outside so we could clean the henhouse spick and span. There weren't a lot of hens, so the work went by very fast.

All we had to do now was get the birds back into the henhouse, but we still had a lot of time before we needed to do that. We got to play and study until it was time. Then, once it was finally time, we made the hens go inside. They couldn't fly, but they were very fast, so it was hard to catch them. When we were working together, though, we were all smiling.

Just like that, we'd finished our first day of work. On the next day, we went back to the henhouse to take care of the birds again...but there were even more birds than before. Everyone was very confused.

"There are more birds," one of us mumbled, finally saying it out loud.

When we counted them, we found out that there were ten new hens. Everyone seemed confused, but we went to work. Then Yuna came back. When we told her about the birds, she told us she'd brought them over.

We were surprised, but that made sense. We'd be getting more and more of them, Yuna said, so we'd have to work very hard.

Chapter 38:

Headed to the Capital

Fina's Chronicles

FOR THE FIRST TIME in my life, I was going to the capital...and with Yuna too. Even if I was nervous, I was also really excited. But then, in one second, all that excitement was crushed by new anxiety.

We were going to the capital with Lady Noir, the daughter of the lord. The moment I heard that, the anxiety and fear took over.

Would I be executed if I was rude? If I'd known I was going with Lady Noir from the start, I wouldn't have gone in the first place. Yuna told me Lady Noir was nice, but I was still worried.

We were getting closer and closer to the lord's estate. I wanted to go home right away, but there was no escape for me. But if Lady Noir said that she didn't want me coming along, then I could go home, even if I'd feel bad doing that to Yuna.

Once we were at the estate, I saw a girl with very pretty blonde hair. I'd seen her before from far away. She was Lady Noir, and she stood very proudly in front of the gate, waiting for us.

Was she mad I was there? When I got closer, I could see it more clearly. She was very upset. Lady Noir glanced at me, and I immediately hid behind Yuna. *I'm so sorry. I'll go home right away, so please forgive me.*

Yuna asked Lady Noir why she was so upset. It had to be because I was here, right? But no, that wasn't it. She'd just gotten so excited about going to the capital that she'd been waiting for Yuna for a while, standing around outside. I didn't think Yuna was to blame for that.

Yuna asked her permission for me to tag along. Lady Noir stared at me for some time before she said I could come too. But then she pointed at me and declared (to my shock), "But you can't have the bears!"

She really wanted both Kumayuru and Kumakyu to herself, but Yuna said we had to share a bear together.

Lady Noir jabbed her finger again. “But I get front seat!” Oh, she was just too scary...

I rode behind Lady Noir on Kumayuru. When I started talking with her, I found out she was a very nice person. Even though I was a peasant, she wasn’t bothered by it. She was actually very excited to talk all about the bears. She was having a lot of fun telling me all about how she’d ridden on Kumayuru around her estate once, and how she’d taken a nap with Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

I’d been worried about what’d happen on the trip, but it ended up being a lot of fun.

Actually, it almost didn’t even *feel* like a trip. We didn’t have to camp outdoors. Thanks to Yuna’s bear house, we got to sleep safe and sound in warm beds. We even got to cook and eat warm meals. But the most unbelievable part was the bath. A bath on a trip? Were we nobility? I’d never heard of luxuries like this on a trip.

Adventurers talked about trips all the time at the guild, but it never sounded nice at all. They’d told me that you could only have simple meals and that someone had to keep watch at night. There were no baths, of course, and no warm bed to sleep in. But we didn’t have to keep guard at all, and we had nice warm blankets to sleep under. Yuna really was amazing.

Plus, no monsters came near us during the daytime thanks to Kumayuru and Kumakyu. It was a very safe trip. The adventurers would’ve definitely been very jealous of us.

In the middle of our trip, while we were having such a nice time, Yuna asked the bears to stop—there were monsters attacking people up ahead! I couldn’t see them, but it had to be true if Yuna was saying it.

Yuna asked Lady Noir what she wanted to do—should we help or ignore them? If we went to help, we might end up in danger too, and Yuna was very worried about that. They talked it over, and Yuna ended up going to save them.

Yuna started running. She was very, very fast. Lady Noir and I followed—

though we were way slower—until we could see what was happening. We saw a carriage very far away. Near the carriage, we saw monsters that were shaped like very big people.

Those were orcs. They were stronger than goblins and were much harder to slay...or that's what people said. But practically the moment Yuna got close to the carriage, the orcs collapsed in a blur and stopped moving. What had Yuna done?

"What was that?" Lady Noir whispered, seeming just as confused as me.

Yuna had defeated all the monsters in just a few minutes. She'd slain them while we were still trying to figure out what was happening... It was amazing.

It looked like things were safe again. Kumayuru and Kumakyu started walking toward the carriage, and we followed along. Once we got there, the adventurers turned their swords toward us for a moment, surprised, before lowering them.

The monsters had been attacking a very well-to-do older man, a little girl, and also a lot of lady adventurers. Lady Noir knew the girl and the older man, and they were really excited to see each other again. The girl's name was Lady Misana, the older man was Lord Gran. They were both nobles.

Now I was just anxious again. Sure, Lady Noir was nice, but what about these new people? I had to be careful about what I said and how I acted. I'd probably be fine as long as I kept quiet until we headed out. Once we left, after all, we'd go our separate ways.

Or so I'd thought. But instead Lady Misana and Lord Gran came along with us to the capital. I was very nervous, but I couldn't say that out loud. I could just hope that they were nice people.

Then something very inconvenient happened. Since we were traveling with Lady Misana, we couldn't use the bear house anymore. We weren't allowed to use it in front of others. Yuna said that Lady Noir and I were a special case. Yuna said I was special? That made me very happy.

I was sad we wouldn't have baths or beds anymore, but this was just how travel was supposed to be, and I wasn't about to complain about that.

Since Lady Noir rode with Lady Misana in the carriage, I got to ride on Kumayuru on my own. I was a little happy, but Lady Noir spoke up. “I’ll let you have the bears this time, but make sure to remember that’s my seat.”

Could she tell I was happy to get the bear all to myself just from my expression? I needed to get better at keeping a straight face...

Because the carriage was traveling with us to the capital now, the bears couldn’t run too fast. Yuna looked a little annoyed that we were going slowly... but then she fell asleep on top of Kumakyu. It was always so nice to sleep on top of Kumayuru. So soft and warm! I hugged Kumayuru and started to feel sleepy.

Lady Noir stared at me with a jealous look from the carriage, and I remembered to keep as much of a straight face as I could. But Kumayuru was so fuzzy and comfortable, I couldn’t help but break out into a smile.

Then it was night. We couldn’t use the bear house, so we camped outside. I thought it would be cold sleeping outside, but I got to sleep with Yuna and Kumakyu, so it was completely fine. Kumakyu was fluffy, cozy, and warm. Even Yuna was really soft next to me and warm too. I was so happy.

As for Lady Noir and Lady Misana, they were sleeping with Kumayuru. I think if I’d have been the only one sleeping with Kumakyu, Lady Noir would’ve held a grudge against me, so I was glad it turned out this way.

I also got to talk to Lady Misana, and it turned out she was very nice after all! We talked a lot about the bears and had a lot of fun. In the carriage, Lady Misana told me that Lady Noir had explained all the wonderful things about the bears.

After Lady Misana slept on Kumayuru, she was just as crazy about bears as the rest of us.

“Listen,” Yuna warned, “if you see a real bear, make sure you don’t approach it.”

I hadn’t ever seen bears besides Kumakyu and Kumayuru, but other bears were supposed to be scary. Still, it was hard to imagine that with Yuna’s bears. Kumakyu and Kumayuru were even letting us ride them, after all. What

kindhearted bears!

Nothing else happened after the orcs. The day ended uneventfully, and we set up camp. In the middle of the night, Kumakyu started to jostle me. Marina, one of the adventurers, woke me up too. Had something happened?

Yuna was supposed to be next to me, but she was gone. According to Marina, bandits had appeared and Yuna had ran off to defeat them. She'd told Marina to let everyone sleep, but Marina just couldn't do that, and that's why she'd woken us up. She told us to get ready to move at any moment.

Just as Marina asked, we started picking up our blankets and things, getting prepared to run away at any time. Marina asked Lord Gran what he wanted us to do. Wait, were we leaving Yuna behind? Lord Gran seemed to be thinking something over...and as he thought to himself, we heard a sound.

What was that? Marina and the other adventurers got their swords ready. Something black like a shadow was coming toward us from far away.

It turned out to be a bear carting a very big cage... A cage full of bandits! Yuna had caught them all on her own. I was amazed she'd caught them, but no one knew whether to ask about the giant bear or the cage first.

But then Yuna said she used "a little" magic to both capture the bandits and make the bear. All of us were shocked speechless. I don't know much about magic, but even I could see that this was weird.

"So..." said Yuna. "Should we go back to sleep?"

I think all of us were screaming inside. No way we could sleep! In the end, we decided that we might as well just head out in the middle of the night.

The rest of the trip to the capital was uneventful. We were happy, but the bandits sure weren't. We hadn't fed them on the last leg of the trip. Lord Gran's guards eventually took the bandits to the capital, and they'd probably get to finally have meals there. That was kind of a relief.

From there, we got into Lord Gran's carriage to enter the capital proper. What would it be like? I was so looking forward to it.

Chapter 39:

Headed to the Capital

Cliff's Chronicles

HIS MAJESTY'S BIRTHDAY festival was to be held in a few days' time at the capital.

I would be in attendance, of course, though my departure had been delayed after a certain incident. Furthermore, I needed to leave instructions as to how my day-to-day work would be conducted while I was at the capital. Yes, I never lacked things to do...

To arrive at the capital on time, I determined I'd need to drive a horse at a grueling pace. I couldn't force my daughter Noa to make such a trip, and so I decided to leave her in the hands of a certain adventurer with a penchant for dressing as a bear. They would make the trip ahead of me.

I departed from Crimonia a few days after Noa had set off with the bears to the capital. Since it had taken me so long to finish my mountain of work in Crimonia and I was in such a hurry, I took a horse rather than a carriage and set out without a moment to spare. Perhaps my entourage would drive the poor horses too hard, but we needed to hurry.

I had thought the trip would be an ordeal, but the weather held up and the horses fared well so we made quite a bit of progress. At this rate, we would arrive even sooner than expected. As we galloped along on the second day, we caught sight of something strange on the horizon. That was...

"Lord Cliff, it's..."

"I know," I said. "I can't believe there's more than one of those things."

There was a familiar structure ahead of us, just off the beaten path. I led my horse off the road and toward the building.

There it was, right before my eyes...that house that looked like a joke. A familiar sight indeed, a house shaped like a bear. I only knew of one person who

would build something like this, and I doubted she had some sort of twin.

“I will investigate,” I said. “You can wait here.”

I stopped my horse, dismounted, and slowly made my way to the house. Then, with perfect timing, the door opened, and out came exactly the person I’d expected.

It was a girl dressed as a bear—and no, I don’t mean bear pelts, but a cute bear costume. I still didn’t have the faintest idea as to why she dressed this way. But I *did* know that she was a powerful adventurer, and that my daughter Noa liked her. She was a girl of many mysteries.

But what could she have possibly been doing? I’d sent her off with my daughter to the capital, after all. She looked surprised to see me, although I rather thought that *I* was the one who should’ve been surprised.

She told me that monsters had been spotted in the vicinity and that she had come to get me. Then she told me that because it seemed she was no longer necessary, she’d be heading home. It made no sense to me, and I could tell from the way she was acting that she was hiding something.

I asked her about it upfront, but the blasted bear wouldn’t give me any explanation. After I persisted in my inquiry, she finally admitted that there was something she hoped I’d sweep under the rug using my influence. What was this girl trying to force me to do?

When I told her that I couldn’t just agree to something like that, her reply shocked me. “But aren’t you a noble?”

What did she take the nobility for? Regardless, I asked her why she wanted me to make some problem disappear, and what it was. She just said we’d need to talk inside the bear house, probably so my men wouldn’t hear. I ordered them to take a break and then headed into the bizarre house.

It was a normal house on the inside. A table, some chairs...a bona fide home, really. I had my questions about how she had even managed to make a house here, but right now I decided to focus on getting whatever she was hiding out of her.

Once she started talking, my jaw hit the floor and stayed there. It was simply

unbelievable. Ten thousand monsters? A wyvern *and* a giant wyrm?

After defeating all of those and ensuring that the area around the creatures was safe, she'd debated with herself whether to look for me...and decided it'd be too much trouble. Such an incident was also obviously going to be a huge deal at the capital, but she'd still planned to go home without speaking a word of it.

I wanted to hold my head. If it was all as she'd said, we couldn't be silent about such an uproar...no matter how much she wanted me to use my influence to make this disappear.

Of course, most adventurers would want deeds like these to be reported. They would want the fame and fortune that came with such recognition. But it seemed she had no interest in that. No, she wanted to live a quiet life...which was odd to hear from someone dressed like *that*.

But if she'd truly defeated ten thousand monsters for my sake, despite wanting to keep out of the public eye, she had saved my life. I couldn't scold her or tell her off. On top of all the fatigue I'd built up from work and travel, I suppose I'd have to shoulder this too. For now, though, I needed to check if she was telling the truth. I'd see it all with my own eyes, and then we'd talk.

According to Yuna, there were goblin corpses and orc heads in the nearby woods that could serve as proof. I ordered my men to search the area. In the meantime, I'd have her show me the wyverns and the wyrm.

I had hoped it wouldn't be true, but every new shred of evidence made that less and less likely. My men reported that it was just as she'd told me: they had found a mountain of goblin corpses. My head was beginning to smart. What was I supposed to do with this?

She truly *had* saved my life. Had she not defeated those monsters, we would've surely been besieged by ten thousand monsters and some wyverns to boot. And yet she told me that under no circumstances did she want anyone to know about this.

I needed to do something about it, she said. Still, I couldn't keep silent about something like this either, despite her request. But before we did anything else, we needed to do something about the adventurers heading to meet the army-

that-wasn't. If the guild master or vice guild master were around, perhaps we could talk to them about it. I fleshed out some semblance of a plan and headed off to the capital.

On the way, though, I had a spot of luck and caught the adventurers on their way over. Better yet, I had an opportunity to meet with the guild master, Sanya, as well.

Sanya and I were on familiar terms. I told her the truth and asked her to feign ignorance about the blasted bear. It took a while for her to believe me, but she came through in the end.

The two of us coordinated how we'd keep this under wraps and avoid telling others about the bear. We also needed to figure out what to say to His Majesty, the adventurers, and the knights.

We were going through so much trouble, all because she didn't want anyone to know the truth. Then again...no one would've believed us in the first place if we claimed that a girl dressed like her defeated ten thousand monsters along with a few wyverns.

A story like that would only draw strange looks. And the girl would obviously deny such a thing, which would make me seem downright silly. Frankly, it would be far easier, and a lot more credible, to pass this off as the work of some mysterious A-rank adventurer.

Sanya agreed, and that part of this plan was a raging success. Word of the A-rank adventurer immediately got around. Sanya's adventurers even looked relieved.

Had we claimed that a bear had defeated the monsters, no one would have believed a word of it. I myself wouldn't have believed it had I not already been privy her numerous exploits in Crimonia, or seen the wyrm and wyvern corpses with my own eyes.

We managed to pass off the false story, and the bear girl went ahead to the capital to let Noa know I was safe. As for myself, I would accompany the adventurers on their own journey back to the capital.

Although Sanya wanted to return quickly as well, she told me that she needed

to examine the scene of the battle before heading back.

I arrived at the capital without further incident. Although there was quite the hullabaloo at the capital thanks to the employees at the adventurers' guild who followed that blasted bear here, the uproar wasn't as severe as I'd worried.

Finally, I arrived home at my house in the capital, exhausted both in body and in mind. Once I arrived inside, Noa happily escorted me through the house.

"Father!"

"Did I make you worry?"

She seemed to be doing well. I stroked her hair, which seemed to also cheer her up even more.

"Cliff, I'm glad you're safe," said my wife, Ellelaura.

"All thanks to Yuna," I replied, and she smiled.

Then I saw Shia, who had come home from the academy. Finally, the family was together again. I suppose I could thank the bear for this reunion as well. Then, for the first time in quite a while, I had a meal with my entire family.

"And Yuna is so very strong," said Shia.

"Her bears are cute too," said Lady Noa.

"They really are," said Ellelaura, laughing.

Why were we talking about that blasted bear at our family reunion? Shouldn't we have been catching up or something? Still, I couldn't interrupt them...not when my daughters looked so happy to chat about it all.

That night, I retired early in order to rest my weary body. I would be waking early the next day. It would be best to sleep early as well.

I crawled under the covers. Just as I was about to head into the land of dreams, someone entered my room and interrupted my rest.

"Why are you sleeping, dear?"

"I'm tired, so I'm sleeping," I said. I turned my back to Ellelaura. I really was so very exhausted. Please, just let me get some rest...

“None of that now,” she said. “You need to tell me everything before you go to bed.”

“Tell you what?”

“You’re hiding something about the ten thousand monsters, aren’t you?”

“I have no idea what you could possibly mean.”

“You think I don’t know? A horse was sent to tell us that an A-rank adventurer had defeated all ten thousand monsters. Which is, of course, impossible.” She’d rejected the story Sanya and I had cooked up outright. “There weren’t A-rank adventurers around, were there?”

“As I said, it was all a coincidence. They were passing through.”

“Yuna.” The moment I heard her name, my whole body twitched. “The bear.” Another twitch. “Your tongue is lying but your body is telling the truth, eh?” Ellelaura touched my back. “Yuna defeated those monsters, then.”

“I have no idea.” I couldn’t talk to her about this. I’d promised the blasted bear I wouldn’t. She had saved my life, without a doubt. She had fought ten thousand monsters and some wyverns all for my sake. I couldn’t break a promise to her now.

“You think you’d be able to get away with a lie like that with me?” Ellelaura loomed above me. “You were lying when you talked about all those monsters, and Yuna seemed grateful about something. Now why is that?”

“I think you’re reading a little too much into things,” I said.

She tried to bait me, but no matter how sweetly she whispered to me, I wouldn’t talk...for a while. But the more time passed, the less I was able to fight the fatigue and my pressing need for sleep.

I’m sorry, Yuna. I just wanted rest.

I told Ellelaura everything. As I drifted off into dreamland, I whispered an apology to girl in the bear suit.

Chapter 40:

Encounter with the Bear

Cheese Village Chief's Chronicles

“CHIEF, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?”

For the first time, goblins began appearing near the village. Even though we had guards, and even though we watched their behavior, they had still managed to attack our precious cattle the other day. Now we were trying to figure out how to handle it.

“Our only option is to hire an adventurer,” said one of the villagers.

Another shook his head. “The village hasn’t got that kind of money.”

We weren’t too well-off, although we weren’t exactly a poor village either. We had fields to till and had made our living taking care of cattle and other livestock. Better yet, we made something that no other village nearby could create.

“If we don’t hire an adventurer, we’ll just suffer more damage,” said the first.

“But what if the goblins don’t come back?” the second shot back.

“And what if they do? You want to be responsible for the aftermath?”

“All I’m saying is that we don’t know for sure. And the village really hasn’t got any money. Even if we wanted to hire an adventurer, it’s not like we could get one without coin. Or do you want to fork up the cash for them to come?”

“Well... If we just collect a little from everyone...” the man’s voice trailed off.

I could understand both of their points. The question was, did the village *really* have the money for an adventurer? We had nothing to sell besides our precious cattle, and that was obviously out of the question. But at this rate, the goblins would attack those cattle anyway. No, we only had one option to make money for the village.

“We must go sell cheese at the capital,” I said.

Those gathered were, of course, shocked to hear my decision.

“Chief, don’t you remember what happened last time? Not a single person bought our cheese. People even made fun of us!”

Whether it was nearby towns or the capitals, nobody bought cheese from us. Nobody even dared to taste it. Instead, they accused us of letting perfectly decent dairy go bad, and complained of the mold and smell and such. No matter how I told them that it could be delicious when placed between slices of bread, no one dared to buy it.

Perhaps they would this time.

“The king’s birthday festival will soon take place at the capital,” I said. “People from all sorts of towns and villages will gather that day. If many people gather at the capital, there may even be some who will buy our cheese.”

They were to make a large celebration of the king’s fortieth birthday in the capital. All sorts of people would be there. It would be an opportunity to sell our cheeses. If we let this opportunity pass us, we would never have another chance. And if we didn’t bother trying to sell something, there was no way at all that we could hire an adventurer.

One by one, they began to agree with me. We all knew the chances of our cheese selling were low, but what other options did we have? Still, we were grasping at straws.

I stocked a carriage with cheese in order to head to the capital. I would be going with my son, Ogul.

When we arrived, we were shocked by the number of people there. Still, I was hopeful at least some among them would buy our cheeses. It gave me hope.

In order to sell wares in the capital though, we needed permission from the Merchant Guild. First, we went to procure lodging, but it was rather difficult to find a place to stay. While we did find something eventually, it was a rather small room. We decided that I would take the bed and Ogul would sleep on the floor.

The next day, I went to the Merchant Guild to get the permission we needed. Because there were so many others seeking permission too, it was quite

crowded. I took a slip with a number and waited for my turn to come.

They called my number, and I was able to obtain a seller's permit without issue. But when the guild worker asked me what I was selling and I replied it was cheese, they gave me a dubious look. Still, I had permission and I could sell our cheese at the capital, and that's what mattered.

The next day, Ogul and I brought our cheeses to the stalls that lined the square. We'd been told to set up here: we were also told that the early bird would get the worm. And so Ogul and I lined up by the square's entrance quite early in order to secure ourselves a good location.

They'd even designated a time for when we could enter with carriages. We quickly brought our cheeses in and set up the stall to open shop without issue. I told Ogul he could rest, as he had been working since early in the morning. I ended up being the only one to mind the stall.

As time went by, people gathered at the square. At this rate, surely we'd be able to sell the cheese...or so I thought, but every potential customer looked at it with disdain.

"It's mold," they said.

"What *is* that?"

"Disgusting..."

Even when I told them it was food and safe to eat, none of them would believe me.

I told them it was delicious and suggested they take a sample, but none of them would even try it. They would've understood if they only gave it a chance, but no one did. Even when I explained that it was eaten between slices of bread, customers refused. Few stopped to visit the stall, and even fewer still stuck around long enough for a sales pitch. Even those who heard me out would turn me down.

But...if we couldn't sell the cheese, we wouldn't have money to hire an adventurer to slay the goblins. So many villagers waited for us at home. I started to pitch to the people in the square more directly.

“Please try some. It’s delicious.”

No one would stop for me, except a man who was red in the face from drink.

“What is this thing?” I could smell the alcohol wafting from him.

“It’s a type of food called cheese.”

“It’s molding! Gone bad! You think you can sell this stuff?!”

“It’s not bad,” I insisted. “The mold isn’t bad at all. You can eat the insides.” I cut the cheese and showed him a beautiful slice.

“But it’s still molding. How could you sell that stuff?”

“This isn’t any normal mold,” I tried to explain.

“Mold is mold.” He was having none of it. And, because he was shouting so loudly about mold, others seemed to think we were selling expired merchandise. At this rate, no one would buy any of our cheese.

“You can eat the insides,” I insisted.

“Who’d eat something that’s molding like this!”

Despite my best attempts to explain, the man turned even redder as he became downright belligerent. He wouldn’t listen no matter how I explained. I could see it in their eyes... The crowd was beginning to think that cheese was a dirty word. Perhaps we were done for.

But just as I was giving up, I heard a cheerful voice address me. “That’s cheese, isn’t it?”

I looked in the direction of the voice to find a girl dressed as a bear. It was a curious outfit, but this oddly dressed girl had said the word cheese. She knew what it was? It was surprising, but I was grateful for it.

When I attempted to begin a conversation with the girl, the drunk man tried to pick a fight with her. I was helpless to do anything, but no matter—in the span of an instant, the girl grabbed the man’s hand, punched him in the gut, and left him sprawled out on the ground. The spectators around us were flabbergasted. The girl in the bear costume had beaten the man.

While we were staring at the man on the ground, the guards came. For a

moment, I thought they would order me to stop selling my wares, but it seemed that the bear girl knew one of them. Instead, they took the drunk man away. I could only watch in shock.

The bear girl began addressing me as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. She was even looking at our cheese as though she wanted some. Would she perhaps buy some? I began to talk with her.

“Would you buy some, lass?”

“Depends on the price. How much is it?”

I told her. If she bought some—even for a low price—it might convince the people watching us to buy as well. And so I offered her a price lower than usual.

And then the girl said something absurd. “I’ll take it. I’d like all of it.”

I doubted my very ears. What had she just said? Was I mistaken, or had she just offered to buy *all* of the cheese? I couldn’t believe it. Though I’d lowered the price, a child couldn’t have afforded everything at that amount. I thought she’d been joking, but—as though to prove that she could buy it all—the lass produced money from the bear glove on her hand.

That was when I realized she wasn’t lying, joking, or mocking me in the slightest. I thought she might complain of the mold later, but she seemed gleeful when she saw the cheese. She was genuinely happy to have some and I, in turn, was happy that she’d been looking for cheese.

I took the money from her. We would be able to hire an adventurer with this. Truly, this was divine providence! The village was saved!

The lass told me she wanted even more cheese, so I told her we had more at the village. She said she’d come to buy it. We agreed to a deal in advance. Things like this weren’t supposed to happen in reality.

I told her we’d been having money troubles and thanked her for helping us, which prompted her to pay even more for the cheese. In exchange for that, I promised to sell her the cheese for a discount when she came to the village.

If she was able to spend such a large sum of money so easily, she had to be the daughter of some aristocrat...but she told me she was an adventurer. She

had easily dealt with the drunk man, so she likely wasn't lying.

That day, when I told Ogul a girl had bought all of our cheese, he wouldn't believe me. I likely wouldn't have believed it either had I not seen it myself. Though Ogul was still dubious, he certainly changed his tune once he saw the money. With all that profit and not a bit of cheese left in our inventory, Ogul had no choice but to believe me.

After that, we put in a request for goblin slaying and bought many things with the money we had left over before heading back to the village. I had the girl who dressed as a bear to thank for everything.

Truly, I was eternally grateful to that charming girl who dressed as a bear.

Chapter 41:

Encounter with the Bear

Karin's Chronicles

IT WAS ANOTHER day of baking and selling bread.

But soon enough, we wouldn't be able to keep selling bread at the bakery. I didn't understand what had happened, but...once my father had passed away, I was no longer allowed outside of the bakery. My mother spent nights sobbing alone, although every day she pretended to be happy in front of me. She told me again and again that things would be fine, and that I shouldn't worry. I didn't know what I could say, considering how she was feeling. All I could do was respond with a smile.

Many people had gathered at the capital for His Majesty's birthday festival, and our bread sales were going well. Then, out of nowhere, a girl in a cute outfit came to buy some bread. She was dressed as a bear. I'd never seen anything like it before, but she looked adorable in it.

She told me that she'd come because the delicious aroma of baked bread. It made me happy to hear that.

"Well, if it's good," she said, "I'll come by again."

"Yes, we'll be waiting," I said.

She took the little girl who was with her and left. I hadn't known girls dressed so cutely in the capital. Or maybe she was just visiting for the birthday festival?

Time passed. We kept selling bread and things were going well. Mother continued to bake tirelessly and I set the bread out up front to sell it. Yes, things looked good...but not for long.

Scary men came into the bakery. They began to fling our precious bread to the ground. The customers were so shocked by the pandemonium that they fled from the bakery.

"What do you think you're doing?!" I cried.

“How long do you plan on sticking around here?” one of the thugs snarled.
“We already told you to hurry up and clear out.”

“We should still have time.” Mother had said we had until the end of His Majesty’s birthday festival.

“Plan’s changed. If you don’t like it, take it up with that dead father of yours!”

The man grabbed the freshly made bread and started to squish it in his hand. The bread crumpled. Mother had put so much work into that loaf...

“Don’t want to end up like that, do ya?” he spat.

I glared at him.

“What, girly? Why you lookin’ at me like that?”

When the man raised his hand, Mother came and shielded me.

“Pssht. All right. I already told your girl, but you better clear out soon.”

“We had an agreement,” said Mother.

“Agreement, shmagreement. I couldn’t care less!” The man kicked over a stand of bread, scattering all of our hard work to the floor.

“Please no!” Mother and I yelled, but the men wouldn’t stop ransacking the shop. They seemed to take a sick pleasure in destroying everything we’d made, knocking our bread to the ground, crushing it beneath their feet...

Please stop...

They stamped everything Mother had worked so hard to make under their dirty feet.

Someone, please help...

But no one was going to help us. They were going to destroy the bread and the bakery. One of the men reached out to me. Mother tried to stop him, but he hit her.

Mother!

The moment the man hit her, something black flew into the bakery. It was the girl in the bear clothes. The man went flying. The girl looked at the state of the

store, horrified. The men came after her, and then she started to fight them off.

I couldn't understand what was happening before my eyes. Before long, the men ran out of the shop as if they were fleeing.

"Are you okay?" asked the girl in bear clothes. She seemed worried. It was the same girl who'd bought bread from me earlier today, and she'd saved us. I was sure to thank her at once.

Still...when I looked around the bakery again, I realized what a terrible state it was in. We wouldn't be able to reopen like this. Even if we could, the men would just come again. An overwhelming sadness came over me. I fought the urge to cry. I couldn't let that happen, not now. That would make Mother feel terrible. No, I couldn't cry... I had to hold back my tears.

While I was trying to hold back my emotions, the bear girl began to discuss something with Mother. The next thing she said shocked me.

"Then do you want to come work at my shop?"

I didn't understand how we'd gotten there, but that was what the girl had said. I tried to ask for more details, but this wasn't the time. The men could come back soon, so we needed to get away from the bakery.

We quickly grabbed what we could and followed the bear girl out. I'd really wanted to clean up the bread, but we hadn't had the time for it. Mother seemed to feel the same way. First and foremost, we needed to make sure we were safe.

Thinking about the future made me apprehensive. Mother held my hand tightly, though. As long as I was with her, I realized, I would be fine.

On our way to the bear girl's house, we introduced ourselves. Her name was Yuna. The little girl with her earlier, she said, had been Fina.

We headed from the middle-class districts to the upper-class areas, then stopped in front of a particular house—Yuna's. It didn't look anything like the other houses around it.

"A bear?" A bear house stood before us. Was this Yuna's house?

Yuna told us to go inside. It looked normal once we entered it. I mean, it was

hard to decide *what* was normal in a house like this, but there weren't any bears there.

We sat down and started discussing our future. We couldn't go back to the bakery anymore, and the men would be angrier than ever. It was possible we'd even have to leave the capital. If that was the case, our only option was to take Yuna's offer and work at her shop.

We asked her for more information. Yuna produced a dessert in a cup that she called pudding. She also showed us something called pizza, which seemed to use bread dough as its base. She said she wanted to sell them at the shop, along with the bread we'd bake.

I took a pudding and tried it. It was incredibly good. I was surprised when she told me the pudding was made from eggs. Then I tried the pizza, which was also incredibly delicious. I hadn't known foods like this even existed.

After we went over everything, Mother and I decided to take Yuna up on her offer to work at her shop. We couldn't go back to our bakery anymore, so she said she'd lend us a room until we left for Crimonia. We were going to stay at her bear house.

"Mother, what do you think will happen to us now?"

"All we can do is put our faith in Yuna," she said. "She saved us. If she's going to offer us a job now that we have nowhere to go, that's the only option we have right now."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right."

"Besides, she doesn't seem like a bad girl."

The next day, we went more into the nitty-gritty details. Yuna would pay for our carriage fee to Crimonia and prepare a place for us to stay there. She couldn't decide on our wages yet so we'd figure that out later—there was someone she worked with in Crimonia that she needed to talk to first. She also told us we'd be working with some orphans.

We talked about various other aspects of her shop when we heard a commotion outside.

“We’ll break the door down!”

“Get out here, bear!”

It was the men from yesterday. They’d found this house. Fina gave Yuna a worried look, but Yuna just said she’d be going out to talk to them all by herself.

I tried to stop her, but she just brushed us off and said that she was an adventurer. I knew she was powerful, but...here she was talking about opening shops *and* being an adventurer? What was she, exactly?

Unable to stop her, we watched as Yuna left to go outside on her own. We watched the scene from the window.

There were a ton of men outside. Yuna walked alone into their group. It was all our fault, wasn’t it? Yuna started to egg them on. I could tell even from here that they were incredibly angry. Yuna...why are you *trying* to make them upset?

Worst of all, she even told them to stop talking because their breath smelled. I couldn’t believe how calm she was, even surrounded by more than ten men. They became even more angry and started trying to attack Yuna, but then...they disappeared?!

“It’s a hole,” said Fina, and she was right. Where the men had stood was just a gigantic hole. Could Yuna use magic?!

A massive man began to rage at Yuna, but right then, someone new stopped by the house. I couldn’t quite make out what was being said, but it seemed as though the new person was the guild master of the adventurers’ guild.

Another man appeared as well. The face looked familiar. Someone said something about...the king? But no, it couldn’t be him. It *looked* like him, but surely it couldn’t *be* him.

The guild master captured the large man easily, and the man who claimed to be the king entered the house. No, he really *was* the king. Mother and I couldn’t understand what had happened. I looked at Fina, but she seemed just as clueless.

Then, Fina very innocently asked Yuna, “Who is this man?”

The blood drained from my face. But Yuna’s reply was calm as ever. “He’s the

king.”

I couldn’t understand what was happening anymore. Why was she speaking with His Majesty as though they were friends? Why had His Majesty made a personal visit to Yuna’s house? Fina, too, seemed dumbstruck when she heard that this was *the king*.

Yuna and His Majesty began to talk nonchalantly. He’d come to ask Yuna to make the pudding we had eaten yesterday for His Majesty’s birthday banquet.

It was all too much. I couldn’t keep up anymore, and Mother seemed to be feeling the same. Why had the king come to ask her for this? Who was Yuna? I was completely at a loss.

After asking Yuna for the pudding, His Majesty left. Yuna then asked us for something completely out of the question: she wanted to teach us how to make pudding so we could make it for His Majesty. It was mind-boggling. We couldn’t make food that would be eaten by His Majesty.

Mother and Fina were of the same opinion as me. We all refused. Even the idea of making food for His Majesty’s banquet was too terrifying to contemplate. If anything happened, we’d definitely be executed. We absolutely could not make it.

After we all turned her down, Yuna narrowed her eyes and looked very upset at us, but she started to make the copious quantities of pudding on her own regardless. I wish she wouldn’t give us that look. We just couldn’t do it.

Even though we weren’t going to help her, Yuna was still kind enough to teach us how she was making the pudding. She produced a large number of eggs from the bear puppet she wore and got to work. So this was how it was made, then...and she was quite good at it too.

“You’re not running the shop yourself, Yuna?”

“Well, I’m an adventurer,” she repeated, just like before. After seeing her save us and use magic, I could believe it...but then I looked at her bear outfit, and it suddenly seemed less plausible again.

Yuna made more and more pudding until she’d fulfilled His Majesty’s order all on her own.

“Got it memorized?” she asked.

After seeing her repeat the recipe over and over again, I believed I did. It was a lot easier than I had imagined. We were going to make this and the bread. I started to feel excited, almost as though none of the nightmarish events of yesterday had happened at all.

I was starting to look forward to going to Crimonia.

The next day, guards came to Yuna’s house. They’d caught the merchant who had tricked my father. The merchant had been up to many nefarious crimes and had even used His Majesty’s name to condone his wicked actions—in front of His Majesty himself. They had decided his punishment would be execution for his great crimes.

As part of that, Father’s bakery would go back to my mother. Yuna was incredibly excited for us...but that also meant we couldn’t go to Crimonia.

Mother and I headed back to the bakery. I knew it wouldn’t magically be better now, but it was still somehow surprising to see it in the same sorry state as before, after the men had ransacked it. The bread was scattered everywhere, trampled on, dirty...

Mother and I did the only thing we could. We began to clean.

“Mother,” I said, “Yuna is very kind.”

“She is.”

“And the pudding was so good.”

“It was.”

“She even taught us how to make food she was serving at His Majesty’s banquet. Maybe she shouldn’t have...”

After all, Yuna had only taught us that secret because we were going to work at her shop. And yet she’d sent us off without comment today.

She’d saved us from the violent men in our shop. She’d even taken care of the merchant and the men who had followed us to her house. And she’d taught us

to make pudding—pudding the king had come to order directly from her. When Mother and I had nowhere else to go, she'd let us stay at her house. All we had done was take from Yuna without giving her anything in return.

“What would you like to do, Karin?” Mother asked. “Would you like to keep working at the bakery? Or would you like to go to Yuna’s shop?”

“I’m not sure...” Until yesterday, I had been sure about working for Yuna. She was friends with His Majesty and, more importantly, she was kind. She'd saved Mother and me.

“I suppose we should repay her,” said Mother.

“Mother... I think you’re right. We really should.”

We cleaned up the shop until it was neat and tidy again, and then went to ask Yuna to let us work at her shop.

Chapter 42:

Encounter with the Bear

Sanya's Chronicles

I'M THE GUILD MASTER of the capital's adventurers' guild.

His Majesty's birthday festival was fast approaching, and the capital was bustling with people. That meant the adventurers' guild was busy too. We had all sorts of quests coming in—escorting, guarding, and more. I was buried in paperwork in my office when I heard a commotion outside.

What in the world was going on now? I was always telling them to keep it down. I left my office to talk to them.

"You're being too loud!" I snapped.

One of the workers turned to me, surprised. "Guild master?!"

"What are you making such a fuss about?" I asked her.

"It's that." She looked outside.

The adventurers, too, were staring outside. What was going on out there? I scratched my head and left the guild only to find an oddly dressed girl there.

Was she supposed to be a bear? This girl, who was dressed so adorably, was using wind magic to toss some grown men into the air.

This...had to be a joke, right? Keeping someone in the air with magic was difficult. Yes, blowing someone away was easy, but keeping them up there? That was another matter. You'd have to concentrate the wind magic in one spot, then blast it all up at once in a split second. If you didn't do that, they wouldn't rise up into the air as nicely.

The men yelled as they flitted through the air. Then they fell straight down, completely powerless. At this rate, they'd end up hurt.

Right as I tried to spring into action, an air current gathered near the ground. The wind magic caught the men as they hurtled to the ground, cushioning their

fall. How did I know it was wind magic, you ask? Well, we elves specialize in wind magic. I know exactly how much finesse that magic takes.

I remembered Gran, the older noble gentleman who had come to me just a few days ago. This person must have been the girl dressed as a bear that had saved Gran.

I started talking to her. She was an adventurer from Crimonia and she'd been surrounded by adventurers while coming by to see the adventurers' guild. Since they'd tried to manhandle her, she'd dealt with them in this way.

Gran had already described her to me, but I still hadn't thought she would be such a powerful mage. If she could use magic like this, I bet she could easily handle an orc.

Still, to think that the adventurers would try to mess with a small girl. I'd warned the adventurers a thousand times not to get in stupid fights, but here we are. If you ask me, I'd say the men who'd been blown up in the air were getting their just deserts. It'd be a good lesson for them. As for the girl, she said her name was Yuna.

The bear girl told me she had a letter from Ralock, the guild master of Crimonia. I looked it over. It said that trouble would likely follow her when she arrived, and that I should keep an eye on her. Hah! Too little, too late. She'd already caused plenty of trouble by getting involved with those adventurers.

If these types of things happened to her because she was dressed as a bear, couldn't she just stop dressing like one? I guess she didn't plan to do that. In fact, she'd give any adventurer who picked a fight with her a beating. She'd already pulverized some adventurers in Crimonia. She was clearly a powerful adventurer, but you sure couldn't tell from her appearance.

To make sure it didn't happen again, I made sure to warn the adventurers already here...not that I expected any of them to make such a stupid mistake. They were already talking amongst themselves in the aftermath of the bear girl's wind magic reckoning. I highly doubted any adventurers would ignore my directions and invite my wrath.

Still, there was one thing that I still wondered about. Had she really defeated a black viper as the letter claimed?

Several days later, I received word that several hundred monsters—maybe even thousands of them—were approaching the capital. This...had to be a joke. Right?

I called my summoned bird, Folg, in order to confirm the information and sent him flying over the forests. I could see through Folg's eyes. The monsters were supposed to be in a certain forest. Folg entered the woods and checked the surroundings.

Oh. Oh no... Seriously?! Through the bird's eyes, I saw several hundred swarms of wolves, goblins, and orcs, each a hundred strong. Why hadn't anyone noticed until now?! And where had these monsters even come from? I even saw slumbering wyverns among them.

I informed the castle of the state of emergency we were in. Then we gathered adventurers and posted an urgent monster-slaying quest. But we didn't have any high-rank adventurers at the capital's guild. Powerful monsters rarely wandered near the capital, after all, and high-ranking adventurers sought out areas with more formidable opponents.

The highest ranking among them were just in rank C, and there weren't many of them either. I asked the C-rank adventurers to handle the wyverns and assigned the wolves, goblins, and orcs to the others. But there were still so many monsters—too many.

I had no idea when reinforcements would arrive from the castle. The soldiers had been sent off to guard the capital during His Majesty's birthday festival. Though they could have sent knights and mages, it took time to dispatch them. For now, we had to rely on adventurers to stop the monsters.

I gathered them and we headed off to the forest where the monsters were coming from. During a brief rest on our journey, I had Folg fly ahead to check the safety of our route.

As we were looking around us, we saw something running over. Was that a bear riding a bear? Wait, was that *Yuna*? Several horses were also following her. It didn't look like they were being chased around by a wild bear.

Yuna and the others reached us and, to my surprise, the lord of Crimonia himself was riding one of the horses. What was Yuna doing with Cliff? I knew Yuna was from Crimonia, but there were so many mysteries about her.

I knew Cliff from days past. He was an aristocrat, but he never put on airs and was rather likable. His wife, Lady Ellelaura, was employed at the castle, and I sometimes ran into her.

Cliff made his way over to me and asked to speak to me in private. We headed to a place without prying ears.

By the time he told me everything, I was dumbstruck. Had Yuna—the girl in the bear suit—really defeated all those monsters?

I had Folg fly to the forest where the monsters had been...and they were gone. All that remained were goblin corpses. Even all of the wolves, orcs, and wyverns were gone. She really *had* defeated all the monsters.

It beggared belief. I couldn't process it, even after seeing the truth from Folg's own eyes. But it was true. The monsters really were gone.

Cliff asked me to keep it a secret that Yuna had slain the monsters. According to Cliff, "No one would believe it if we told them that the bear defeated the monsters."

That was true, but...we dragged so many adventurers out here. What were we supposed to do now? It had turned into a huge, worrisome disaster.

Cliff proposed a solution: he wanted to tell them that a high-rank adventurer had defeated them, and that the adventurer had left the goblin corpses behind.

Well, there *were* several thousand goblin corpses, you couldn't deny that. I even spotted some orc heads. I suppose people could believe it. It was definitely a lot more convincing a story than telling anyone the girl dressed as a bear in front of us had done it.

After that, I explained the matter to the adventurers and had them head out to take care of the monster corpses. If we left the goblins and orcs as they were, beasts and other monsters would begin to gather. The corpses would also rot, which might bring disease as well. We needed to dispose of them properly.

Once we were done with that, I headed back to the capital. I needed to report to His Majesty, so I headed to the castle.

Just thinking of lying to His Majesty made my stomach hurt. But I doubted that His Majesty would believe me if I told him the truth. I myself could still hardly believe that she'd defeated them, even after seeing the defeated monsters. It made far more sense that a passing high-rank adventurer had popped in and taken them out.

"So you're saying an adventurer you didn't recognize defeated them?"

"Yes," I answered His Majesty.

"And you specifically didn't recognize this adventurer?"

"Yes."

"Don't lie," said His Majesty. "You've got a summoned bird. That's how I know your information is reliable. Don't tell me you didn't scope out the area after slaying the monsters."

"Well..."

"And how do you even know that an adventurer did this?"

"Because...only adventurers slay monsters."

"Don't lie," he repeated. "Why are you hiding this? You can't tell me about it?"

"Well... Do you believe that there were monsters, Your Majesty?"

"Of course I do. You've been a trusted guild master many years, and I have more than enough reason to believe in this."

Huh? Yuna and I had seen the monsters, yes, and then there were the adventurers who had seen the corpses. But since we'd already cleaned up the monster corpses, no one from the castle had seen any of them. Why did he so readily believe this? Was it really his trust in me, or...?

"I know who was controlling the monsters," he said.

Oh? Had someone gathered those monsters intentionally? In that case, I could understand why there had been so many of them. But I hadn't suspect

that His Majesty would know the cause.

“I well know how dangerous this incident would have been to the country,” said His Majesty. “Bring that adventurer to me. This is an order.”

His Majesty was forcing my hand. Was there any way to refuse?

“There’s an issue with bringing that adventurer to you,” I said. “Couldn’t you, uh...*not* bring her here? She isn’t in a...presentable state.”

“What?!”

“The problem concerns her appearance.”

“She’s an adventurer. What does her appearance have to do with that? I care not about such things.”

I couldn’t tell him that she was dressed as a bear. “She actually said that having such a commotion would be too much for her and that she wishes for us to keep quiet. I’m indebted to her, so I believe I should honor her wishes.”

“I am indebted to her as well. How can I go on without thanking her? Now, bring her to me!” His Majesty raised his voice slightly. There was no refusing him now.

“Then I have one request.”

“Which is?”

“The adventurer has said she would like to avoid the public knowing that she was the one who defeated the monsters. Would it be possible to keep this meeting private? If you can promise that, then I promise to bring her.”

The least I could do was clear away any onlookers and make as few people knew as possible. But would His Majesty even believe that it was her, after seeing her appearance? Maybe if Yuna showed off the wyrms, but...

“Indeed,” said His Majesty. “I shall meet her alone.”

“Thank you.”

I’m sorry, Yuna. All I could do was whisper an apology.

The next day, I brought the bear girl with me and we stood before of His Majesty. Just as he had promised, His Majesty met her alone. It was a small party, consisting of the king, myself, Yuna in her bear clothes, and Lady ElleLaura—we'd run into her on the way. I felt much better with Lady ElleLaura here. Cliff had told her what had happened.

I told him directly that Yuna, a girl dressed as a bear, had defeated the monster.

"I do not have time for jokes," said His Majesty. "When is the adventurer coming?!"

His Majesty raised his voice. He didn't believe it. He had been expecting a powerful adventurer and then a girl dressed as a bear had come instead. Who wouldn't be upset? He'd told me that he'd believe it, but I suppose that had been a lie.

I tried to explain as best as I could. Lady ElleLaura chimed in too, and he finally believed us. Thank goodness that Lady ElleLaura was here.

After that, Lady Flora came in. There were minor incidents, but the meeting between His Majesty and the girl dressed as a bear went well. I was eternally grateful to Lady ElleLaura. And really, now, this pudding food that Yuna had brought? It was delicious. I would love to eat it again.

With the monster issue settled, I returned to my everyday life. I escaped from my stifling work at the guild and walked through the capital.

Things were busy with the birthday festival still going on and the monster incident as well. Couldn't they cut me a little slack? Then again, if Yuna hadn't been around, things would've been much worse. I owed her a great deal of gratitude.

Once His Majesty's birthday festival was over, things would settle down slightly. I just needed to push on until then. Still, everybody needs a break every once in a while.

As I was walked around, taking in the sights, I kept hearing the word "bear" getting thrown around. Every time, I'd think of Yuna in her bear clothes. If Ralock was right, she was truly an exceptional adventurer.

“Found out where that bear is,” I heard someone say.

“Damn it. She underestimated us yesterday!”

“Heh. This time we’ll bash her good.”

Well, I couldn’t just ignore something like that. I searched for the people who’d been talking and I found the culprits immediately. The frightening conversation had originated from some equally frightening-looking men.

“You weaklings,” one of the thugs chortled. “Letting a little girl beat ya.”

“And I heard she was a little kid in a bear outfit to boot.”

“What kind of loser gets knocked out by a girl?”

The man started laughing.

“Anyway, the woman and her daughter from the bakery should be somewhere around here. We’ll get their location out of the bear girl.”

What? This was turning into a huge deal. Just what had Yuna done?

I couldn’t just ignore this, not after hearing a conversation like that. I tagged along behind the men, making sure they wouldn’t notice me. They made their way to an upper middle-class district... Could Yuna be here?

The longer the men walked, the rowdier they got. And then...

“What is with that house?”

“Is that supposed to be a bear?”

Just like they said, the men were in front of a bear-shaped house. Was that where Yuna lived? Among all the stately houses in the area stood a single, super adorable bear-shaped house.

“You really sure it’s this place?”

“Yes, there’s no mistake.”

The men ogled at the bear house and laughed. Then they started shouting at it.

“Come out here!”

“We’ll break the door down!”

“C’mon, bear!”

As they hollered, Yuna walked out of the house. She wore her bear clothes and looked utterly calm...not frightened in the slightest. After all, she wasn’t the kind of girl who backed down when adventurers picked a fight. It helped that she’d also defeated thousands of monsters. No way would she back off in the face of a few guys. I’d come all the way here, worrying all the way, but I hadn’t needed to worry at all.

The crowd started shouting at Yuna, trying to argue with her.

“Could you close your mouth?” Yuna replied, her face expressionless. “It stinks.” Then she cast a spell, and the ground the men had been standing upon opened up. Before the men knew it, they’d fallen into a hole in the earth. I could hear them crying out in pain from the bottom. Only a rather rotund man had been left unharmed, standing at the mouth of the pit.

Seeing Yuna’s magic again impressed me almost as much as it had the first time. I guess she could use earth magic too.

The last man standing started to back away. “Do you know who I am?” he shouted at Yuna. “I’m Jowlz the merchant. I even have clout with the master of the adventurers’ guild. What’s a little girl like you supposed to be able to do, huh?!”

I had no idea who this man was, but wasn’t like I could just stand by now that he’d tried to namedrop me. No way did I want Yuna to think I knew a man like this.

“Oh, I don’t know who you are,” I said from behind him.

The man looked shocked. How interesting. He had no idea who I was, even though we were such “good friends.” If he was going to use my name, he could have at least figured out what I looked like. What an empty-headed lout. Yuna introduced me and he let the surprise show on his face.

“Yeah? Well...who cares about guild masters?! I’m close with the king himself.”

Ha! Really? He was retrying the same scheme with His Majesty? Seriously, was there a single gram of brain matter rattling around in that skull of his?

Maybe it was just a yawning void in there.

And, with perfect timing, who would arrive but...

“Who are you?” asked His Majesty the king himself. “I’ve never seen you before in my life.” What was His Majesty doing in a place like this?! It made my head spin.

We tried to tell the man that this was the real, actual, *literal* king of the nation. He simply wouldn’t believe us.

“There’s no way the king would be here.”

I mean, we all got where he was coming from with *that*. Even Yuna was surprised.

His Majesty commanded me to arrest the man, even though I was supposed to be the most senior member of the capital adventurers’ guild. Then again, there wasn’t really anyone else here with both the strength and authority to pull it off.

I arrested the struggling man, and shortly afterward, got the other goons out of Yuna’s earth magic hole. As for His Majesty, he headed into the bear house. I wanted to follow, but I couldn’t just leave the men on their own.

I produced a rope from my item bag and began to tie the men up. Then I took out a piece of paper and wrote that I needed men sent to my specific location, slipped it into Folk’s beak, and sent him off in the direction of the guard captain.

Before long, soldiers came running over. I handed the men off and accompanied them to the castle to explain the situation. His Majesty left the house around the same time, so the guard captain escorted him to the castle.

What a downright bizarre series of events, but...that’s how it had been the past few days, thanks to the bear girl.

Chapter 43:

Encounter with the Bear

Milaine's Chronicles

I AM THE GUILD MASTER of the Merchant Guild in Crimonia. After I've completed my guild master duties for the day, I sit at the front desk, occasionally checking on the merchants. Since those who didn't know me on a personal basis didn't know I was the guild master, they'd speak to me normally.

Whether it was start-up merchants, get-rich-quick types, buyers, sellers, client-seekers, whoever—all sorts gathered at the guild. I quite enjoyed interacting with those who made their way there too.

As I managed the front desk, a lone girl entered. All eyes fell on her. I, of course, watched as well. She gathered the many stares due to her eye-catching outfit. Which was...a bear costume.

Ah, it was *her*. The bear girl who'd caused such a stir at the adventurers' guild.

She was fifteen (though she looked much younger) and had fought off some adventurers who'd picked a fight with her on the day she'd registered at the guild. Then, she'd slain fifty wolves in a matter of days. A lot of her wolves were in good condition too, so we'd been selling the furs she produced for much higher than your typical market price.

Slain monsters and materials and such came to the Merchant Guild from the adventurers' guild so that we could sell them, and with those products came information. Based on some recent info, she'd apparently slain a goblin horde, the goblin king that ruled them, and even tigerwolves. Most unbelievable of all, she'd apparently soloed every one of those monsters.

The girl in the bear outfit came straight to me. I asked her what she needed, trying to keep my poker face. Any adventurers who'd made fun of her bear clothes seemed to end up in a pretty sorry state.

She said that she wanted to build a house, so she needed to rent some land. A

normal adventurer likely would have just rented the house itself, but renting the land to build on it? I rarely heard of that sort of thing.

But the customer's always right, so I collected several packages of land to propose based on her wants. She chose one, but she needed a few moments to think about the price. My intuition was kicking in now, and I knew that maintaining a connection with this bear girl would be vital for the Merchant Guild. Trusting my gut, I offered her a discount on the land to strengthen our ties. She seemed surprised, but she looked happy in the end and took me up on it.

From there, I led her to the plot of land itself. I told her I could help her find a contractor to help with building her house, but she told me she wouldn't need one. At that point, I felt I'd accomplished my goals and it was time to get back to work...and then, not long afterward, *it* happened, and I realized my work was not yet done.

That was because the bear girl had instantly created a bear-shaped house. An average house takes a few weeks to build at the very least, yet she'd made this one overnight. And I mean *made*, not *built*. None of my intel suggested that anyone had built the thing.

It seemed impossible, but had she built it with magic? A skilled mage could create walls and make a house that way. This was quite a bit cuter than they typically came out though. It made me a little sad that I hadn't seen her build it.

From there on, she just continued to impress. First, I learned she'd defeated a black viper, a gigantic and fearsome snake that could swallow a man whole. She'd learned that the viper had been terrorizing a village, and headed off right away to slay the creature. Once again, she'd somehow done it alone.

The black viper was harvested at the adventurers' guild. When the materials came to us, all the merchants who'd heard about the monster came to buy parts of it, and there was a whole lot that we could sell. The meat, skin, and fangs were plentiful, but the materials were also rare. Naturally, they flew off the shelves, so to speak. We refrigerated some of the meat, and also made sure to store some of the skin and a few of the fangs for later.

The unfortunate thing was the mana gem. I'd definitely wanted that, but the bear girl had—to my chagrin—taken it for herself.

There was one more surprise: Yuna also had an item bag that could fit an entire black viper. Item bags that could fit such large and heavy objects were exceedingly rare and expensive, and it was shocking that she had one.

The item bag packed a second surprise as well. You see, the bag was a glove in the shape of a bear's head. That was adorable, and I wanted it.

Still, why would an adventurer with such a fine item bag come to Crimonia all on her lonesome? I collected all sorts of odd pieces of bear girl information from all sorts of place, but no one around Crimonia knew who she really was. She hadn't had a resident card when she came in, which sunk my theory that she'd arrived from a nearby village.

Well, regardless of who she was, my course of action remained the same. I needed to strike up a friendship with this girl. Someone as interesting as her would never leave me bored.

She never ceased to amaze.

Next, she bought land near the orphanage, then created some large walls and started raising her own kokekko. It seemed she was doing that for the orphans and wanted to start selling their eggs. I was all for selling anything we could through the guild, so I struck a bargain with her.

A few days after we had started selling the eggs, things had been going well. We were primarily selling them to high-end restaurants and the wealthy, who hadn't been able to get eggs except at double the price until now. We had an avalanche of orders. Well, they were very inexpensive, so of course they would sell.

On top of that, though we only had a few of them on hand, we had a stable supply coming every day, which allowed us to make some plans and which we were thankful of as a guild. On top of that, I learned that the supply of eggs was steadily increasing.

Then one day, the bear girl came by and shared something called pudding, which was apparently a thank-you present for me. I had to work right then, so I took it in order to try it later. I was looking forward to trying it once I was free.

According to her, she would be heading to the capital for an escort job. Come to think of it, His Majesty's birthday festival was being held in the capital. I would have gone had I not had work.

It was the end of the work day. I took the cup of pudding Yuna had given me out of the refrigerator. The pudding was made from eggs, so it looked a bit yellow. I had never seen such a food before. I tapped it with my finger. Hmm... Soft. I picked up a spoon, scooped up a mouthful and tried it.

"Oh!" It had an odd texture. It was cold and sweet too. I took a second bite, then a third. Before I knew it, the cup was empty.

What *was* this? She'd made it from eggs, yes, but *how*?

This could sell. You work long enough at the Merchant Guild and you develop that sort of instinct, you see. Yes, there was no doubt at all in my mind...

I wanted to immediately head over to the bear girl to talk with her about the pudding, but she'd told me that she was heading the capital tomorrow. I'd need to talk with her about it when she came back.

Time passed, and all the while I was so pudding-obsessed that I couldn't concentrate on my work. If we sold the pudding in a shop, I could eat it whenever I wanted. Yes, that was it. I'd propose the creation of a pudding shop when the bear girl came home...

Chapter 44:

My Big Sister's Job

Shuri's Chronicles

WHEN I WOKE UP, mom was hurting. My big sister gave her medicine, but mom hurt so much. She couldn't even drink it. Still, Fina rubbed Mom's back. She tried to give Mom the medicine a little at a time.

"We don't have any more medicine, so I'll go to the woods and pick some herbs," said Fina. "Take care of Mom, okay?"

Sometimes Fina worked to make money, but we didn't have enough to buy medicine right now.

"You could ask Uncle?" There was a man mom knew and he got us medicine. But Fina shook her head.

"We can't keep asking him. I'll be right back, so watch Mom." She stroked my head. It was nice.

I nodded and stayed by Mom's side while she was hurting. She smiled when I did that, like she always did.

When my mom wanted water, I poured some in a cup and brought it over to make her feel better. When she coughed, I rubbed her back. She always said thank you when I did that, every time.

Mom would get better soon, right?

Mom started hurting again, but we didn't have medicine. I held Mom's hand. Fina said Mom would get better and it would all be all right, but...Mom didn't feel better. She was always hurt.

Fina would come home soon from getting all the medicine. I held Mom's hand and waited. Soon, Fina did come back with some herbs. She fixed them so Mom could drink them easy.

After a while, Mom calmed down and went to sleep.

Fina started to get food ready. It smelled good.

“Shuri, we have meat today.”

“Really?!”

“Really. I’ll get it ready, so just wait.”

Fina had meat in front of her! We hadn’t had any in a jillion years. I helped her.

Fina cooked it. I heard it sizzle. I listened to it and set up the plates.

Aww, I wanted to eat it soon!

“It’s done.” Fina put the meat on a plate. It looked sooo good.

I brought the plate to Mom’s room and we ate together. It tasted very good.

“Where did this come from?” Mom asked.

“Someone gave it to me,” said Fina.

Huh. Maybe she got it from Uncle Gentz?

The next day, Fina went to work super early. I wanted to start working soon too. If I could, I could eat until I was full and I could buy Mom medicine too. I told Fina that, but she just said, “You stay with Mom, Shuri.”

Mom always was sleeping. She seemed like she was doing okay though. I stayed with Mom for Fina.

Because Mom was doing good today, we could talk a lot. She always looked better when she talked, but she also always said sorry at the end. I didn’t understand why. Why did she say sorry?

Today’s dinner was real good again. Fina said it was from an inn and that she got it from today’s work. We had soft bread, meat, and salad too. I hadn’t eaten soft bread like this in a long time. I always had to put hard bread in soup to eat

it.

Mom looked like she liked it too. Then she said thank you and hugged us. I could hardly breathe, she hugged so hard!

“Shuri.”

“What is it, Fina?”

“I’m going to be late, and I might not be able to come home. I left bread, so eat that with Mom, okay?”

“You’re not coming back, Fina?”

“I have new work starting today, so I might be late. I’m not sure. I’ll try to work hard so I can get home earlier. If I’m late, eat with Mom and make sure to go to bed early.”

“Uh-huh, okay. But come back soon.”

Fina gave me a gentle hug.

I had fun talking with Mom today. The sun was starting to set. Fina still wasn’t home. I ate the bread that Fina left for us with Mom.

“Shuri, where’s your sister?”

“She’s late ’cause she’s doing work.”

“Did you ask what kind of work?”

I didn’t, so I shook my head.

“I hope that it’s not too dangerous,” said Mom.

But then Fina came home. When Fina came home, Mom was angry. That didn’t happen much. Fina said she went with someone slaying tigerwolves. When Mom heard that, she fell over onto the bed.

“Mom, it was fine. I was harvesting them in a safe place.”

“But you were alone.”

“It was okay. There was someone (a bear) watching over me.”

“But you just said that there was only one adventurer.”

“It was okay, I promise. Don’t worry.”

“I won’t worry if you don’t make me worry,” said Mom. She gave Fina a gentle hug.

I was worried too. If something happened to Fina, I would be sad. Maybe forever!

Fina was working every day now. She could buy medicine and food.

“Shuri, let’s go shopping together. Let’s eat something yummy. Is there anything you want to eat?”

There were lots of things I wanted to eat. I wanted soft bread. I wanted fruit. But what I wanted most of all was something that would make Mom happy. I told Fina that.

“Then let’s get something that Mom will like, Shuri.”

I held Fina’s hand and we went shopping together. But for some reason Mom was worried about Fina when she bought the food.

Was the work dangerous? Mom asked her.

Then Fina said she was doing harvest work for an adventurer she had a contract with every day. She said she was getting money for it, and meat too.

Mom looked worried.

“It’s okay,” said Fina. “She’s a very trustworthy person and Uncle Gentz introduced us.”

When Fina mentioned Uncle Gentz, Mom looked a little relieved. Mom asked what kind of person the adventurer was, and Fina said a girl in a bear outfit. A bear? We asked about that, but then she said the adventurer was a very cute bear.

An adventurer dressed as a cute bear. I wanted to meet her too.

Chapter 45:

Encounter with the Bear

Atola's Chronicles

THE APPEARANCE OF THE KRAKEN had left the town of Mileela in a terrible state.

Mileela was primarily a fishing town, so not being able to sail out to sea was a life-or-death problem. It had been a month since the kraken had appeared. People were beginning to abandon the seaport, some of them accompanied by adventurers working as guards. They hadn't come back.

None of the adventurers had even thought about battling the kraken, of course. They couldn't win something like that. All we could do was wait until the kraken left...if the beast ever would.

Seafood was the main staple of our diet, so we had food scarcity issues soon enough too. Bandits had appeared on the sole road out of the seaport, making it impossible for us to get food from outside either. Normally, adventurers from the guild would've been tasked with squashing the bandits, but the ones left at the guild were all too low-ranking and unskilled to deal with bandits.

On top of that, the Merchant Guild was taking advantage of the situation through their wealth by buying wolves and animal carcasses at higher amounts than usual. From there, they sold the meat back to the townspeople at an even higher price point. Supposedly the funds would be used to hire someone to slay the kraken, but I had my doubts about that. We offered to help manage the funds on the adventurers' guild's side, but they refused us.

Now, only the wealthy had been able to buy food. Everyone else just couldn't get anything to eat.

"Guild master, we're heading out to the mountain."

"We're counting on you. I'm hoping we can distribute some food to the families with kids and the elderly."

The guild workers who could fight were going out to hunt for food. I was the only one watching over the guild.

No one was coming in. At first, townspeople had entered the guild in the hopes we would be able to slay the kraken, but they stopped showing when they realized that the adventurers were gone.

In the middle of the mess, four adventurers had made their way here unscathed by the bandits. After learning about the situation our seaport faced, they told us that they couldn't deal with the kraken, but they could at least suppress the bandits.

But we didn't know how many bandits there were, or even their location. Despite that, the man told us that adventurers were meant to help people in need. The women in the party agreed with him.

If we could only do something about the bandits, we would be able to go to other towns to buy food. We could escape this horrid situation. The adventurers had granted us a ray of hope.

The next day, another stranger came into the guild. This time it was a cute girl dressed as a bear. The poor thing had probably come looking for food. Unfortunately, I had none.

But it seemed that wasn't the case. As a matter of fact, she said she'd come to bring *us* food. The inn she was staying at had told her to bring it to the adventurers' guild rather than the Merchant Guild.

Ha! I had no idea how much food she had, but I appreciated the thought. But I ended up much happier than I'd anticipated.

She said she'd brought wolf meat. At first, I thought she just had one carcass.

The bear girl promptly tried to give me a thousand of them. She wasn't kidding, either. I stopped her in a hurry, and we arranged for her to give me just a hundred of them.

Even if she gave me all thousand, we wouldn't be able to harvest them all. And why had she brought so many wolves in the first place? How did they all fit in her item bag? And why weren't any of them rotting in there?

The mysteries only deepened, but she didn't seem very willing to talk about them. I decided not to pry—no reason to sour her mood. Everyone has their secrets. I was just grateful that she even offered us food.

I ordered the guild staff to start harvesting the wolves. We had quite a few to get through, after all. Whenever someone finished their harvesting work, they moved onto distributing the meat to homes in need.

People began gathering at the guild once they learned what was going on. We wrote out a list on paper and distributed the meat according to the makeup of their family. No one lied, because we'd find out right away.

"Guild master, where did those wolves come from?"

"Umm, well..." Here we go. "This cute girl dressed as a bear gave them to us."

"A...girl dressed as a bear?"

"I didn't ask her too many questions, and neither should you. There are a lot more wolves were that came from, so I don't want to put her in a bad mood."

"She has even more?"

"A thousand, apparently"

"Guild master, that's just ridiculous."

They were telling me. It was an absurd number. But she actually tried to bring them out for us. She really did have a thousand wolf carcasses in her item bag. I told my workers that if we didn't have enough meat, they needed to go to the beefcake dad who ran the inn where the girl in the bear clothes was in order to ask her for more.

For now, we were saved. If the four adventurers just take care of the bandits now, our food problems might be over...

The next day, the bear girl came back to the guild and said something downright ridiculous. Even if she couldn't fight the kraken, she said, she could and would take out the bandits. I tried to stop her—it's dangerous to go alone—but she left anyway.

The worries started the second she left. I knew exactly what sort of horrors awaited a girl captured by the bandits.

But the bear girl came back before long, bandits captured. I couldn't believe it. At first, I'd thought that the four adventurers had caught them since they'd been with her, but apparently she'd both found the bandits and defeated them all alone.

Who would believe that? An adorable girl in a bear outfit defeating a legion of dangerous men all on her own? And yet she was also the owner of a mysterious item bag that could carry a thousand wolves. She traversed the mountains in the snow. Maybe something like that was possible for her.

Shortly after that, the master of the Merchant Guild was implicated and taken into custody for his connection to the bandits.

With the roads bandit-free, we prepared to send out an expedition to buy food from other towns. The four adventurers were to escort them, and we'd soon be able to escape the threat of starvation.

But even without that thread, I suspected that more people would abandon the town now that the roads were clear. As long as the kraken was around, the town would continue to deteriorate. All I could do was pray that the kraken would disappear.

Then, as I sat there hoping, the bear girl made her way to the adventurers' guild. It seemed she would be battling the kraken, and she wanted me to keep everyone away from the port and ocean.

My jaw dropped, which probably looked pretty silly. But...a kraken? She was going to defeat a kraken all on her own? It was insane. Bandits were nothing compared to a kraken.

But maybe this enigmatic girl before me could really do it.

I did what she said and made sure no one would approach the ocean. There were a lot of fishermen who would've gone out, so I had old man Kuro make

sure that they stayed in during the battle since he had sway with the fishermen.

His eyes had gone wide as I told him, and he looked surprised. Yeah, I bet I didn't look too different from that.

"That just sounds like a dream," he said. "Defeating the kraken."

"She got across the mountains all on her own."

"Damon said the same. That she saved him too."

"That's not all. She also solved the hunger shortage."

"That's the girl that gave us meat?"

"And she captured the bandits on the high roads."

"Eh? I heard that was four adventurers."

"She didn't want the attention, so that was the official story. But yes, she was the one who did it."

"Even if that's all true, do you really believe she'll be able to beat that kraken?"

I faltered a bit. Maybe it *was* just a dream to beat the kraken...but no, my feelings hadn't changed.

"She said that she's going to risk her own life for the sake of our town. I have no idea how she's going to do it, but she knows how terrifying it will be to battle the kraken. She knows that this is no joke. She doesn't have any ties to this town. She's a complete stranger. No reason to battle the kraken and no reason to save the town. But she's still fighting it for us. And since she knows that it could be dangerous for the townspeople, she's asking us to make sure they don't go near the shore. As an adult, I can't just stand by and do nothing. If helping her is the best way to do something for the town, I want to do what I can. She's put an awful lot of thought into this."

I told old man Kuro exactly how I felt. He closed his eyes and fell into silent thought. A few seconds, he opened his eyes and began to speak.

"All right. I'll tell everyone myself, and I won't let anyone near the port or the ocean either."

“Thank you.”

“But I feel mighty pitiful relying on a young lass.”

“You and everybody else.”

On the day of the battle, I headed out with the bear girl. Even if I couldn't fight the kraken, I could at least watch over her. I rode her bear summons with her out of town—the farther away we were from town, the less likely it was that we'd have any collateral damage.

We made our way to a cliff. She was going to lure the kraken here and fight it. I suppose it would be easier to battle the kraken on a boat if she could lure it this way, but I had no idea what that would even look like. However she was going pull this off, it wouldn't be easy.

Then, she produced a giant wyrm from her item bag. Bait, apparently.

Right off the bat, I was wowed by the fact she had something like that in her bag, and it seemed ridiculous that she was using that for bait. Where had she gotten it in the first place?

While I was thinking that over, the girl lowered the wyrm down the cliff like she was fishing. It was impossible. Unbelievable. Fairy tale stuff.

We made small talk for a while, waiting for the kraken. Eventually, the bears that were with us began to croon. We looked out to sea. A giant wave rose, and part of the kraken rose from the ocean. Slowly, ever-slowly, it came over to us.

There it was—the kraken. Waves roiled around it as its gigantic tentacles wrapped around the wyrm. It'd taken the bait!

Instantly, the bear girl went into action. Gigantic stone bear statues erupted from the sea, trapping the kraken.

Was that magic? I felt like the bear girl had stumbled slightly too. That made sense—she'd likely depleted a lot of mana to cast such a great spell.

But then she started to attack. This time, she was using bear-shaped flames.

She threw the flames at both the kraken and the sea, and the air heated up. I could hear the kraken sizzling as the sea began to boil and steam. Thanks to the flames, the water where the kraken was trapped had begun to boil.

The kraken thrashed in pain. It struggled, trying to reach out with its tentacles to destroy the bear statues, but it failed. When it tried to climb up the bears, the girl used magic to attack it so it couldn't escape.

Maybe she could actually win? She was unilaterally attacking the kraken, but she didn't seem to be doing well. She was using too much mana, more than anyone could hope to use.

Still, she pressed the attack. She couldn't let the kraken escape now.

The seawater kept rising in temperature, billowing greater amounts of steam all the while. Even from some distance away, I was sweating. But the bear girl was right up there in the steam, still fighting. That alone must've been exhausting.

The kraken's movements gradually slowed. Eventually, it stopped moving altogether. Had she defeated it? I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

She staggered. I thought she was about to fall over. I ran over to her, but the black bear got there first, ready to support her.

The bear girl looked over at me. "It's over." She looked so tired.

I felt close to tears. I checked to make sure the kraken was dead, then headed back to the seaport with the girl.

When the bear showed up carrying the girl, the townspeople were shocked, and almost didn't let her inside.

How dare they? She had defeated a kraken all on her own for our sakes. And then, on the edge of town, she had collapsed from exhaustion. And *this* was how they were treating her?

I told them she'd defeated the kraken and that the savior of our seaport wanted to rest. At that, townspeople headed over to where the kraken had been defeated. I guided the bear the girl rode over to the inn. She needed her

rest.

Once we arrived, the bear headed up the stairs with the girl. I saw her off.

“Thank you...” I whispered. The seaport had been saved, and all by a cute girl who dressed as a bear.

Chapter 46:

Mileela's Tunnel

Cliff's Chronicles

AFTER I LEARNED about what had happened at Mileela, I returned home with guild master Milaine of the Merchant Guild. All I could do was sigh.

I already thought the tunnel connecting us to Mileela was ridiculous, but everything else I'd heard after going to the seaport itself had only served to make things still more absurd. When I heard about the kraken slaying, I doubted my ears. But when I saw the actual kraken hide and its mana gem, there was no more room for doubt. This was the bear girl who had defeated ten thousand monsters all on her own, for crying out loud. When it came to her, this was far from impossible.

I sighed again. I just didn't have time to worry about this.

"I'm going to stop by the adventurers' guild to talk to them," I told Milaine.

We already parted ways with Yuna, the one behind all of the trouble, and it was about time to part ways with Milaine as well.

"I'll leave that to you, then," she said. "I'm going back to my guild in order to get things ready."

"I'm planning on taking Ralock to the tunnel tomorrow. Would you like to come?" I asked.

Milaine looked a bit conflicted. "I'm fairly busy, but...sure, I'll go with you then. Besides, I'd like to speak with Ralock as well."

"All right. If he's fine with it, I'll send a messenger your way later."

After leaving Milaine, I headed to the adventurers' guild alone.

"Ralock, I need to talk with you." Once I was in the guild master's office, I addressed a rather large man—Ralock, the town's guild master.

“Not often I see you here, sire.”

“I need the adventurers’ guild’s help, and I will be borrowing them,” I said bluntly.

“Oh?” Ralock looked rather serious now. “Has a powerful monster appeared?”

“No, but do you know about the Elezent mountain range?”

“Well, of course.”

“Did you also know that there’s a seaport there, beside the ocean?”

“The adventurers head over there sometimes. What of it?” Ralock pressed me to get to the point.

“We discovered a cave there. It connects to Mileela.” I left out the fact that Yuna had dug the tunnel.

“Is that really true?”

It was fairly hard to swallow. A tunnel that no one had seen before? Some people wouldn’t believe it.

“Yes. I went through the tunnel myself and got to Mileela, in fact.” Although I could hardly believe the words as they came out of my mouth, and Ralock seemed dubious as well.

“I’d like you to check on it. Would you come with me tomorrow?”

“You’re not pulling my leg, are you?”

“Why would I come all the way here to tell you a joke? We’ll go with Milaine to the tunnel that connects to Mileela tomorrow morning. Make sure you’re ready to go.”

“All right.”

After I had his promise, I headed home and was greeted by my daughter Noa.

“Welcome home, Father.”

“Thank you, dear.” Seeing her face always lifted a load from my shoulders. I

placed a hand on her head. She always likes that.

“Is something the matter?” she asked.

“No, I’m just a tad tired. But seeing your face always brightens my day.”

“You rarely say things like that, Father.” Still, she seemed happy to hear it.

“How was the ocean? Did you enjoy it?”

“I went for business, not pleasure. But the sea was vast.”

“Aww... I wanted to go too.”

“Yes, well, I have my work cut out for me. Perhaps I can arrange you to see it too.”

I needed to set up a path to the tunnel. Most importantly, I needed to make sure it was safe. There were many things we had to do.

“You better mean that,” she said. “Cross your heart.”

“I do. But I think I’ll be busy for a while. Make sure you mind your studies.”

“Yes, Father.”

I gave her another headpat after she replied, then headed to my office. I called Rondo and had him report back the goings-on while I’d been out, then I told him the same thing I’d told Ralock. He didn’t look convinced, of course, but he also didn’t have any of Ralock’s questions.

“Understood,” he said. “Then what would you have me do?”

“For now, just tell Milaine.” I had him go to inform her when and where we were meeting.

Then I began collecting all the documents I’d need for the future. We needed to move in earnest starting tomorrow, so I had much to do. Even before I met Milaine and Ralock, there were a number of things I needed to prepare.

Just thinking about it made my head hurt. And it was all the blasted bear’s fault.

I went to the adventurers’ guild the next day to head to the tunnel with

Ralock. Milaine was already there as well.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” I said.

“I just got here,” said Milaine, “so no need to worry.”

We didn’t have much time, so we headed out on horses and took off at a quick gallop to the tunnel. I caught sight of the forest.

“A horse would be able to pass through here, but a carriage wouldn’t,” I explained to Ralock as we rode through the woods. “We’ll clear out the place so a carriage can travel from the Merchant Guild to the tunnel. I’d like to request adventurers as guards around then. I don’t want to put the workers in danger, after all.”

“I’ll get together workers later and inform the guild,” Milaine said.

“I’d like to have them slay monsters nearby at the same time. We’ll need to do the same on Mileela’s side too, after going through the tunnel.”

Ralock seemed annoyed. “Are you serious?”

“I am. If monsters enter from the opposite side, we’ll have trouble on our hands. At minimum, I want to make sure that the area on that side is safe. If we can guarantee both sides are safe, we’ll be able to work on the inside of the tunnel.”

“You’re right,” said Milaine. “If we can make sure it’s safe, then we can also install light mana gems.”

“Why are we in such a hurry?” asked Ralock.

I glossed over the kraken matter and simply told him that a monster had appeared in the sea and that the highway had been taken over by bandits, which combined to cause a food shortage at Mileela.

“Guess getting rid of the bandits’ll be the first priority,” said Ralock.

“No need to worry about that. They’ve already been squashed. But the town still needs more food, and as soon as possible. We’ll need guards for that too.”

“Just how many adventurers do you think you’ll need?”

“I’ll see to it that we offer a larger reward than normal for monster slaying.

Please, just get the adventurers together.”

At the moment, time was far more a problem than money. Money would come flowing in after we connected with Mileela. And since we were taking the kraken materials, we could sell those and solve any financial issues if they cropped up.

“This is going to be an ordeal,” Ralock said.

“Oh, yes.”

We passed through the forest and reached the tunnel.

“There really is a hole here,” said Ralock. “You’re saying this thing leads to Mileela?”

The inside was pitch black.

“Make sure to tell the adventurers that we need light magic and light mana gems. And remember this tunnel is really long.”

“All right,” said Ralock. “But why hasn’t anyone spotted this thing until now though?” But I had promised Yuna I wouldn’t say she had built it. “And why is there a bear here like the one from one of Yuna’s shops?” Ralock peered at the bear statue just as curiously he had at the cavern.

“Since she found the cave, I forced her to make it.”

“The bear girl found it, eh?” Ralock shook his head. “She already wowed me with the black viper, and now she’s gotten me all over again.”

He had that right. I could only imagine how surprised he’d be if I could tell him that Yuna had dug the tunnel, or about the ten thousand monsters near the capital, or the kraken slaying... Ugh, thinking about it all at once was giving me heartburn.

“So if I got it all straight, you need all the following: adventurers to clear out the monsters near both Mileela and Crimonia, more adventurers to guard the workers going through the tunnel, and some more to bring the food to Mileela?”

“Yes. If there’s anything else, I’ll let you know as they’re needed. Milaine, is that fine with you too?”

“It is. I suppose I’d like the safety of the area around the tunnel to be our first priority. If we can do that, we’ll be able to level the ground from Crimonia and work on the inside of the tunnel at the same time.”

The work would indeed go quicker if we could get light mana gems set up in the tunnel.

“All right. Give me a list later of what else we need to prioritize. I’ll arrange for suitable adventurers.”

After we scoped out the area, we headed back to town and set to work. Then we were hit with a barrage of busy days.

All the while, of course, that blasted bear just seemed bored.

Chapter 47:

Encounter with the Bear

Misa's Chronicles

I WAS HEADED to the capital for His Majesty's birthday festival. Mother and Father had already gone ahead of us to the capital, so I was going with Grandfather a bit later.

We were in the carriage together and our guards—the adventurers Marina, Elle, and Masrika—sat with us. The carriage was large, too, so it was comfortable. Our driver, Ellrie, sat up front with the reins.

The carriage continued along slowly. Ohhh, I was so bored. We had to sit in the carriage for hours, so being bored was basically all you *could* do.

"Lady Misana, are you bored?" Marina asked from in front of me, a bit to the side. It seemed she could tell from the look on my face.

I didn't like adventurers much because they were a bit frightening, but I liked Marina. She was nice. Shorter trips with adventurers were fine, but longer trips with them made me feel uncomfortable. Grandfather knew that, so he'd asked Marina to guard us. That's why I loved Grandfather.

"Lady Misana, would you like something to drink?"

"Yes, thank you."

Marina gave me some water. It was a bit tepid, but that was how trips went. The water made me feel better, but I was still bored. I should have brought a book.

"Marina, will you tell me an interesting story?"

"An *interesting* one, you say?" Marina looked like she didn't know what to do with my request.

"You don't have any?"

"No, we're simply not very strong adventurers, so I'm not sure we have any

entertaining tales to regale you with. And I doubt you'd enjoy stories about us killing monsters."

"I wouldn't mind even that." I was interested to know what kind of story an adventurer would tell. Marina still looked troubled.

"Misa," Grandfather reprimanded me. "Don't put Marina on the spot like that."

"Oh, I'm sorry." I wasn't trying to make Marina uncomfortable. I just wanted an interesting story to stop me from feeling so bored.

"Lord Gran, she really wasn't putting me on the spot, so please don't scold her. I just can't think of any story that she would like. Are you sure you still want one?"

"Yes, I wouldn't mind."

Marina started telling me stories, though she seemed embarrassed as she did. She told me how difficult it was battling monsters and how terribly disastrous it was when her companions made mistakes. She even talked about how they'd helped her through her own mistakes. As she spoke, Elle would sometimes disagree and sometimes nod along with parts of the story.

Being adventurer seemed like a true ordeal. One had to risk their life for their job.

"Now that was an ordeal."

"Only because you took so long to deal with it, Marina."

"What else as I going to do? I was surrounded."

Everyone bubbled with laughter around her. While we listened to Marina talk, the carriage suddenly halted. Huh? What had happened?

"Marina," said Ellrie in a quiet voice from the coach seat.

"Did something happen?"

"Orcs," he said.

Everyone in the carriage froze.

"Orcs, you say?" Grandfather asked in a stifled voice.

I knew orcs were powerful monsters, but I had never heard of them appearing on the highways.

Marina opened the carriage door and looked ahead. "Four of them, huh."

"Maybe we should head back?" Ellrie wondered.

"Looks like we can't. There are three behind us."

"Four ahead of us, three behind. I still think heading back is the answer."

"If we try that, we still need to get past them," said Marina. "No, I think we should forge ahead. Elle and Ellrie should keep the carriage going. Masrika and I will defeat the orcs ahead of us. Once we defeat them, we'll plow as fast as we can forward."

The other party members agreed to Marina's plan.

"Marina..."

"It'll be fine, Lady Misana. Please don't worry." Marina smiled to make me feel better. "Please don't leave the carriage, Lord Gran. That goes for you too, Lady Misana."

After giving us instructions, Marina left the carriage.

"Grandfather." I looked at him once we were alone in the carriage.

Grandfather hugged me close, as if to protect me.

"Let us believe in Marina's party. But still...what are orcs doing on a highway to the capital?"

The highways were supposed to be safe. Sure, orcs would sometimes emerge from the nearby woods, but not often. And yet orcs were here, of all places.

I prayed that Marina and the others would be able to defeat them without issue.

Before long, I could hear the sounds of battle starting outside.

"Ellrie, I'll take care of the orcs coming from behind. Once Marina defeats the orcs, please let me know. Make sure the carriage is ready to go anytime."

I could hear Elle chanting a spell.

“Elle! More orcs coming in from the woods to the side!”

“I know, but I can’t deal with them!” Elle yelled as she casted her spell.

“Lord Gran, I’m going to move away from the carriage. If you feel like you’re in too much danger, please take the carriage and leave us.”

“Do not say that. Keep heart,” said Lord Gran. “I am sure you will be able to defeat them.”

“We’ll do all we can.”

Ellrie, who was sitting in the coach seat, also got down to fight. I could hear the sounds of the scuffle from up close.

“Elle! More from the right. Careful!”

“Ellrie, buy me some time so I can cast a spell.”

Elle and Ellrie yelled back and forth as they worked hard to protect our carriage. I hoped they would all be safe. I hoped nobody would get hurt...

“Elle!” Ellrie yelled.

I looked out the carriage window. Elle was being held down by an orc. Elle tried to run, but the orc caught her...and brought its club down.

I didn’t want to see it, so I lowered my head and closed my eyes. But the terrible scene was stuck in my head. I couldn’t stop seeing the club come down.

Someone, please save them...

At that moment, I heard a girl’s voice come from outside the carriage. And then...

“A bear?!” Ellrie yelled.

What was that about a bear? Had a bear appeared along with the orcs? I wanted to check, but Grandfather was holding on tight and wouldn’t let go.

I was worried about everyone. I could hear Elle’s voice along with everyone else’s outside, but I couldn’t tell what was happening.

After a while, the carriage door opened. Elle was there, and she was smiling.

“Elle, you’re okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine.” But I could see her clothes were torn. She looked embarrassed by it, but at least she didn’t seem hurt. Thank goodness.

“What happened to the orcs?” Grandfather asked. I was wondering that too.

“A girl dressed as a bear came to our rescue.”

“A bear?” I didn’t understand. Grandfather and I looked out the carriage. An orc lay sprawled on the ground before us. Had they really defeated such a big monster? Wow...

I looked for the others. Marina and the others were still fighting orcs off in the distance, and, thank goodness, they all looked like they were okay. Someone dressed in black clothes stood next to Marina. Looking more closely, I could see that it was a girl dressed like...a bear?

The girl brought down the orcs one after another. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. She shot off spell after spell, and each one hit their mark. Before I knew it, she had defeated every one of them.

The girl then came over to the carriage. She really was dressed as a bear, but she hardly looked like one of the frightening bears I was familiar with. Actually, she was very cute.

That was how I met Yuna.

Chapter 48:

The Birthday Invitation, Part One

Misa's Chronicles

IT'S ALMOST MY BIRTHDAY. Normally we only celebrate with family, but this time I wanted to invite some others too.

One of them would be Noa, whom I adore. She lived in another town, but we've been friends since we were little.

The next person would be Yuna, who dressed as a bear. She *always* dressed like a cute bear, in fact. She had adorable bear summons, was a very powerful adventurer, and she'd even saved my life.

The third person was Fina. She accompanied me and Noa to the capital. Fina was a commoner girl, and was very good at harvesting work. When we met, I felt like there was still a wall between us. But we got to know each other through the bears. We went around together with Noa to the food stalls around the capital and to see the shops during His Majesty's birthday celebration, so we'd gotten to know each other a lot better.

Also, we were both in the bear fan club that Noa had founded. It was the exclusive club for those who think bears are great and love being friends with them!

Hee hee hee! All of this made me feel giddy.

I was hoping to get to know Fina more. Since she lived in Crimonia, it wasn't easy to see her. That's why I wanted her to come to my birthday party. I was hoping we could get to know each other there. I also wanted to see Noa and Yuna too, of course.

I decided to ask Father about it during our meal.

"Father."

“What is it?”

“I would like to invite friends to my birthday party. May I?”

“Friends? Of course you can. Who are they?”

“There are three of them. Noa, Yuna, and Fina.”

Father began to think it over after I told him their names. Would he say no?

“I know Lady Noir,” he said, “but I’m not sure where I’ve heard the names Yuna and Fina before.” He wasn’t opposed, then. He just didn’t know who they were.

“What are you talking about, dear?” Mother cut in, sounding pretty exasperated. “You heard about them constantly in the capital.” She was right. I’d talked about Yuna and Fina a ton at the capital. I couldn’t believe he’d forgotten.

“Fina is a regular girl who lives in the same town as Lady Noir,” said Grandfather in my place. “And Yuna is the girl who dresses as a bear. She saved Misa and myself from a monster attack. Come now, I’m sure you remember that she went out with Misa to the capital.”

Father nodded to Grandfather. “Ah, yes, the girl in the bear outfit who saved you. I wanted to go thank her myself, Father, but you wouldn’t let me.”

“You had your own work to worry about. I’d already thanked her.”

Father had been busy at the capital at the time; Grandfather had tasked him with visiting others in order to become the next lordship. That was why Father and Mother had gone to the capital early. Grandfather and I were to follow we were attacked by monsters and saved by Yuna.

“Misa, you may invite them,” said Father. “I would still like to thank her myself.”

“May I really?! Thank you, Father.”

Father was allowing it! I could invite Yuna and Fina.

I set about to writing the invitations, but I realized I didn’t know Yuna or Fina’s

addresses.

“Perhaps you could get them from Noa,” Grandfather suggested. They did live in the same town as her, so I was sure I *could* do that. But it was my birthday party, so I did wish I could’ve sent the invitations personally.

After thinking about it for some time, I decided to ask Noa for their addresses and tell her that they were invited to the party. I also asked for her help convincing them to come. Since they were both common people, they likely wouldn’t want to come to my party because I was a noble. But I was sure Noa would be able to convince them to come as well.

Later, I received a letter in reply from Noa. She said that it was her duty as president of the bear fan club to convince Fina and Yuna to come. It was very reassuring.

I also sent letters to the addresses she had given me. With that, I’d sent off the birthday invitations. I was very grateful to Noa. All three invitations had the birthday party’s date on them, and I couldn’t wait till that day came. Hee hee... I just wanted to see them already!

There was also one other thing I was looking forward to. Yuna had cute black and white bear summons. I was very surprised when I first saw them, but they were very adorable. The black bear was called Kumayuru, and the white one was Kumakyu. They were fluffy, soft to the touch, and so wonderful to nestle into in order to sleep. I hoped I could see them again.

If I asked her to summon them as a birthday present, would she let me see them?

A few days after that, all sorts of people began showing up for Grandfather’s birthday party. Father was busy greeting them, and so was I. It was so tiresome, though. Finally, our maid Meishun told me that Noa and some others had come.

“What about Yuna and Fina?” I asked.

“Just as you said, a girl in an adorable bear costume and another girl about

the same age as Lady Noa are here as well.”

They actually came! “Where are they now?!” I asked Meishun, then I ran to the room where they all were.

There was Noa, and Yuna too—dressed in her adorable bear clothes. Even Fina was there. All of my weariness vanished and was replaced with joy. I was sure this would be a wonderful birthday party.

Chapter 49:

The Birthday Invitation, Part Two

Misa's Chronicles

BEFORE GRANDFATHER'S BIRTHDAY PARTY, our chef Mr. Botts was attacked and got his arms hurt. Lord Gajurdo of the Salbard family had said some terrible things at the party and it was a disaster.

But then when Yuna found out about Mr. Botts, she went all the way to the capital to bring back Mr. Zelef, head chef at the palace. Mr. Zelef saved the day.

Because someone had insulted his food, Mr. Zelef had come to stand in front of Gajurdo. He didn't look upset, but he had the intense look of someone who wouldn't back down. And since there some people knew of Mr. Zelef's high position, Gajurdo couldn't say anything.

If he *did* say anything bad about the food, the royal family could find out. Gajurdo looked so upset when he left the party with his son, Randle. When I saw that, I felt so relieved.

Everything went well at Grandfather's party once Gajurdo left.

A few days later, it was finally my birthday party. Yuna gave me bears for my birthday present. They looked just like Kumayuru and Kumakyu, and they were oh-so-adorable. Noa looked like she really wanted them, but I couldn't give them to her. They were for me.

Then I got to see tiny versions of Kumayuru and Kumakyu. It was a very fun birthday party!

The day after the birthday party, I went to have a tea party with Noa and Fina before they were going back to Crimonia. We invited Yuna too, but she wanted to walk around the town, so we didn't force her to come. We had a tea party with just the three of us.

We were excitedly talking about Yuna and her bears. But...while we were talking, a masked person dressed in black suddenly appeared in the garden.

“Wh-who are you?!” I asked, but instead of answering, the man came over to me instantly. I tried to cry out, but he covered my mouth.

“Let go of Misa.” Noa grabbed the man’s arm, but he threw her off. She hit the ground and collapsed!

“Let go of Lady Misa!” Fina tried to grab the man this time, but he hit her face and she fell to the ground too.

Noa! Fina! I tried to yell, but the cloth over my mouth kept me from shouting. I tried to shake him off, but he tied my wrists together. Finally, he covered my eyes. The last thing I saw was Noa and Fina on the ground.

Noa, Fina...

He picked me up like I was nothing more than luggage and put me into what seemed like a carriage. I wanted to yell, but the gag in my mouth was in the way. The carriage rolled on...

Eventually, the carriage stopped and I was taken out of it. Once again, I felt like luggage. Where were we? He wouldn’t say a word, so I had no idea.

I heard several doors open. I thought I’d been taken to a room somewhere. Scared now, I shivered. Who was he? I felt fear and anxiety from the bottom of my heart. *Father, Mother, Grandfather, help me. Noa, Fina, I’m sorry.*

The last thing I had seen was Noa and Fina lying on the ground. They got hurt just for trying to save me. My eyes started to well up with tears.

Yuna...

They left me on the ground. I didn’t think much time had passed, but I heard a very loud sound come from somewhere. Because my eyes were blindfolded, I couldn’t tell what was happening. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t see. I could only hear, but that didn’t let me know what was happening. I was petrified.

Then, I heard the door burst open. Someone came inside. I heard the footsteps approaching me. Then somebody grabbed my arm. Who were they?!

“Stand up! Hurry, you, *stand up!*” It was a man’s voice. I’d heard his voice before. It was a voice I hated. “Get over here.”

There was no doubt in my mind that this was Randle, Gajurdo’s mean son. He grabbed my arm and pulled me. It hurt. Where was he taking me?

I tried to fight back, but he pulled so hard that I couldn’t get away. My arm stung. Help... Father, Mother, Grandfather...

We walked for a while, then Randle stopped. Where were we? I was still blindfolded, so I couldn’t tell where he’d brought me.

“Hey, bear! Another move, and she’ll get—”

The moment Randle said that, he let go of me. Shortly after that, I felt something very soft, warm, and reassuring hug me. It was familiar.

“Are you okay?”

I was unblindfolded, and my first sight was a kind smile on Yuna’s face. Yuna had come to my rescue. She’d saved us from monsters on the way to the capital, too... She was always here to rescue me.

I started to cry. I couldn’t stop.

Later, I pieced together everything that’d happened. Randle had kidnapped me, and Yuna had gone on a rampage. In order to save me, she had punched the man in black next to Randle and even his father, Gajurdo.

After Yuna saved me, I went back home. Mother hugged me. Father had been really worried about me too.

“Father, where are Noa and Fina?” They had gotten hit, after all. Were they okay?!

“They’re fine. They’re sleeping in their rooms right now.”

I went to Noa and Fina’s room. When I went inside, the two of them ran to

me.

“Misa, are you okay?!”

“Lady Misa!”

Just as I’d been worrying about them, they’d been worrying about me.

“Are you both okay?” I asked.

Neither of them was hurt. It looked like they were fine. I don’t even know how I’d manage to apologize if they *had* been hurt.

Things got crazy after that. Since the Salbard family had kidnapped me and we were both nobles, the head of the Salbard family, Gajurdo, and his son Randle had been taken in.

Father and Grandfather seemed very busy with that. Lady Cliff and Lady Ellelaura were helping them. Noa hadn’t gotten much time to spend with Lady Ellelaura, even though she didn’t see her mother often. I felt bad about it, but Noa seemed okay. “I can see her anytime though,” she said.

An inquisitor finally came from the capital, which meant Lord Cliff’s job was done. Noa, Yuna, and Fina went home. I felt a little lonely.

But just after those three left, Lady Ellelaura and Grandfather headed out to the capital and I felt even lonelier. Father was busy then too, and Mother spent her time helping him.

I tried to be patient even though I wanted to see everyone, and I spent my time with the bear stuffed animals Yuna had gotten me. Their cute faces made me feel better. Perhaps I could go visit them this time?

After a while, Grandfather came back from the capital. He gathered the family and explained things to us in detail. In the wake of the incident, Grandfather was stepping down from his position for Father to succeed him. He had His Majesty’s permission, so things went smoothly.

As for the Salbards, Grandfather and Father wouldn't tell me much, but apparently they'd been doing some nefarious stuff. His Majesty had learned of it all, and he was taking them down. Gajurdo was being sentenced to death. His son, Randle, would be going to stay with a distant relative.

I was surprised about the death sentence, but at least Randle wouldn't be here anymore.

Then, Grandfather introduced a servant to us.

"I believe you already know of her. She will be under my care from now on."

"My name is Lufa. It's nice to meet you."

She bowed her head. She was one of the Salbard's maids, the one who revealed where the kidnapped kids had been taken.

Grandfather told us about her background. Her parents had passed away and she'd been forced to work because of her father's debts. I couldn't imagine losing my parents... Just thinking about it made me sad.

Grandfather helped Father with work every day after returning. Eventually, that work started to settle down and we could talk to each other more often.

While I was walking down the hall, I saw Lufa holding flowers, getting ready to go out.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Lady Misana?! Ah. I'm going to see my father."

Lufa's father had passed away. She must have meant she was going to his grave.

"May I come as well?"

"You would like to come, Lady Misana?"

"If it wouldn't cause trouble."

"I wouldn't mind, but you would be alone with me." Lufa had worked for the

Salbards, so I guess she didn't think I'd feel safe.

"I'm okay. Grandfather and Father trust you. And I heard about what happened to your family. I would like to pay a visit as well."

"All right. But please ask Lord Gran first."

Oh, right. There were probably people who didn't like Lufa, and she didn't want their suspicions causing her trouble.

"If you would, please wait for a short while," I said. "I'll get permission from Grandfather."

It didn't take long, and I soon left with Lufa.

"Are you not frightened of me, Lady Misana?" she asked me.

"Frightened? Why would I be?"

"Because I was working for Lord Gajurdo. Even though I knew what he was doing was wrong, I also followed his instructions and did terrible things myself. You're not afraid that I did that?"

"To be honest, I'm not sure. But I saw the kids were smiling when we saved them and that they adored you, so I could tell you weren't a bad person. And Grandfather took you in because you admitted you had done bad things, so you could be redeemed. I think that's important to keep in mind."

Lufa had saved the kids. She had told us about the terrible things Salbard had done and was trying to make up for what she had done as well.

"Lady Misana..."

"And it was Randle who kidnapped me, not you. I might tremble if I see Randle ever again. I'm frightened of running into him. But I don't feel that way when I see you or when we're together. I don't feel like running away from you." If Randle appeared in front of me, I probably would have scrambled away. "So I'm not afraid of you, Lufa."

She smiled happily. "Thank you."

We headed to the outskirts of the town. There was a copse of trees, and Lufa

stood in front of one particular tree. Her father was resting here.

Lufa placed the flowers at the base of the tree. "Lord Gran is taking care of me right now, Father, so you don't have to worry. Everyone is kind."

Then she started telling him about recent things that had happened. She seemed to be enjoying herself, even if she was sad at the same time.

"Well, Father," she finally began. "I promise to come back soon."

Then, she left the tree.

"May I also talk with him?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm sure he would be happy for more company."

I took my place in front of the tree. "I am Misana. Lufa is doing a wonderful job working for Grandfather. She's also helping to tend to the flowers," I told him about the things I knew about Lufa. "So you don't need to worry about her," I concluded, looking at Lufa behind me.

"Thank you, Lady Misana. I'm sure that he would feel very reassured."

It would make me happy if he was. I hoped Lufa would be happy too.

Chapter 50:

Intensive Training with the Bear

Horn's Chronicles

OOF, HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? There I was with Yuna...trapped by a pack of wolves. You're probably wondering how I got here...

Well, it was just a little bit ago when Yuna was teaching me magic. Things were going just fine. I'd been asking for advice on handling fast monsters and animals like wolves, since my magic usually missed them. After thinking about it for a while, Yuna told me we were going wolf slaying.

I thought she'd be showing me how to defeat them. Yuna was such a nice person.

Once we were outside of town, we started heading for a place where wolves might appear. I thought we'd be walking, but Yuna raised her hand and a black bear and white bear had appeared in front of us—Yuna's beast summons. The black one was Kumayuru and the white one was Kumakyu. They were very cute bears.

"You already know about Kumayuru and Kumakyu, right?" she said to me.

"Yes, Kumakyu helped me earlier." When my party had been attacked by monsters, Yuna had come dashing in on Kumayuru. Before we knew it, Yuna had defeated the monsters and then had Kumakyu stick to us and keep us from getting attacked again.

I approached Kumakyu. "Thank you so much for back then."

"Cwoom." Kumakyu nuzzled up to me. It felt so nice and fluffy. Oh, how adorable.

"We're heading off on Kumayuru and Kumakyu," she said. "You can ride on Kumakyu."

We were going to ride them? I hadn't expected that.

"Cwoom." Kumakyu crooned at me and sat down so I could get on. What a clever bear. I wished I had such cute summons.

"Thank you, Kumakyu."

"Cwoom."

Once I was on, Kumakyu stood back up. It was great. I felt so comfortable sitting on Kumakyu, and I couldn't wait to brag about it to my other party members.

Before I knew it, Kumakyu had raced past the area of the woods I was familiar with, and we were suddenly in a place I'd never seen before.

Yuna was looking around for something.

"There it is." After she said that, the bears began to set off. Once we'd gone a little ways ahead, they stopped and she looked at me. "All right then, Horn. There's a pack of wolves up ahead. Try beating them all on your own."

Wait, what was that?! Defeat a whole pack of wolves on my own? No, that couldn't be right...

"Yuna, what did you say just now?" I asked, just to make sure.

"There are about thirty wolves up ahead. Beat them alone, Horn."

"On my own?! That's impossible." I shook my head. "Absolutely impossible!"

Yuna told me to get off of Kumakyu. I latched on and tried to refuse to get off, but Kumakyu was listening to Yuna and sat down in order to get me to dismount.

No way. I couldn't. She was literally going to throw me to the wolves! I'd die!

"You'll attack them from a safe spot, so it'll be fine," said Yuna.

While I was still hugging Kumakyu, Yuna made her summons disappear.

"If my bears are around," she added, "the wolves might make a break for it."

That sounded preferable to me.

“All right, let’s go,” said Yuna. She got behind me and caught me by the legs. I thought I was about to fall to the ground onto my butt, but instead, I wound up in Yuna’s arms. She was carrying me bridal-style! This should have been a dream come true for most girls, but it hardly felt that way with Yuna doing it.

“Hold on tight,” she said.

Still holding me, she started to run...and *fast*. I clinged tightly to Yuna so I wouldn’t fall. Then we caught sight of the wolves in front of us. Yuna didn’t seem to mind them and headed right into the center of the pack.

“This is where we’ll fight them.”

In the middle of the pack? *Surrounded? With no escape route?*

This...has escalated quickly...

The wolves growled and inched closer toward us. I tried to hide behind Yuna, but the wolves were approaching from behind us too. The moment I thought we were goners, Yuna raised her hand and something like a pole rose from the ground.

Was that earth magic?! One pole after another rose up, surrounding us. It was almost like a fence. Then Yuna used her magic to make something like a roof on top as well.

I looked around us. It was almost as though we were in a cage of some sort. The wolves were attempting to attack us as though we were their next meal, but the cage protected us. She made something so complex so easily...

“You should be able to attack them safely from here. Look closely at the wolves. They might move slightly differently from individual to individual, but their movements are fundamentally similar. Memorize how the wolves move from here since we’re in a safe spot. Once you can beat them for sure, you’ll be able to keep calm and defeat them even when you’re alone.”

She was right that I wouldn’t ever get the chance to see how wolves moved from this close—at least, not without quickly ending up inside of a wolf belly.

“Also, you’ll need to aim between the bars, so it’ll be good magic aiming practice.”

I needed to attack the wolves through those gaps...?

“All right,” I said. “I’ll give it a try.” I aimed at a wolf that was closer to the bars and used my earth magic to form something like an arrow to shoot at it. I thought I’d aimed right at the wolf, but it dodged. “Why?”

“You were too slow.” Yuna told me. “If you make it quicker, you’ll hit it.”

“All right.” I hadn’t given it enough power when I’d shot it off. I followed Yuna’s directions and tried attack the wolves again.

“Also,” she added, “even though we’re safe in here, you should use this as an opportunity to practice watching your surroundings. Try not to let them get near the bars, if you can. If you’re only paying attention to what’s in front of you, they might get around you to attack.”

“I see...” I looked at the wolves surrounding us and shot off spells all around me. I gradually started to understand the wolves’ movements. I could even tell when they were about to leap. Up until now, I’d been so scared of them that I hadn’t noticed a thing. By being given a safe place to watch them from, and by having Yuna by my side, I was eased into a state where I could calmly watch them.

Then, after I’d beat a few of the wolves, the rest seemed to give up. They ran off.

“Do you feel like you understand wolves a little better?”

“Yes, thanks to you, Yuna.”

I’d never seen training this effective before.

“Information is important, here and everywhere else. If you’re ever with adventurers you know, make sure you listen really closely when they talk about how they defeated monsters. Ask them how the monsters moved. If you do that, you’ll be able to remember what you talked about with them, and you’ll have an easier time with monsters you haven’t seen before.”

“All right.” Maybe I’d ask Rulina about it later.

That night, when I told my party members about slaying the wolves with Yuna, they were all shocked. Yuna had even let me have all the wolves I'd defeated, so we had a really good dinner that night.

I hoped I'd be able to pay Yuna back someday.



CELEBRATING VOL. 11.5'S RELEASE!!

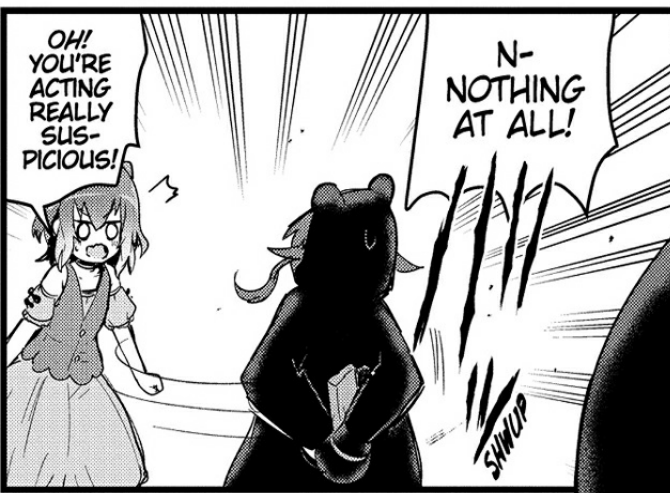
congratulations to kumaharo on the
release of this volume of short stories!
It's been such an honor to be involved
in Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear, which has
over ten volumes out. I'm going to work
hard for the readers who have
supported us until now!!!

I hope you'll
continue to watch
Yuna and her
friends' antics.

All righty then.



READ ME <<<<<<
RIGHT-TO-LEFT





Afterword

I'M KUMANANO. Thank you for picking up *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear* Volume 11.5.

The first volume went on sale in May 2015, and three years have already gone by. There are twelve volumes out now. On top of that, the first volume of the comic came out last year in the summer. I never would've thought that we could come this far. I have the readers to thank for the books being published up to this point. Thank you.

Instead of a new story, this volume contains the collected bonus short stories that came with in-store and e-book purchases of volumes 1 through 9. That being said, we've called it Volume 11.5. I hope you'll forgive us for only including short stories up through the ninth volume. I'm sure it was trouble for readers who couldn't get a hold of those tales.

But we haven't only collected the store-exclusive short stories in this volume. We even have the web versions, and I've written new short stories specifically for this book. There are fifty stories in all. As far as word count goes, I think that this book is probably the longest one yet.

This book even includes the cover illustrations and character introductions. I'm sure you'll see some nostalgic names in there. I'd like to re-introduce those characters at some point.

I think this has turned out to be a wonderful book. No words can express how grateful I am to the publisher for putting together this volume.

Also, the second volume of the comic will be coming out in February, followed by the twelfth volume of the novel in March, so I hope you'll take a look.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who strived to get this book out.

Thank you for working so hard on the illustrations, 029.

I'm always relying on my editor as well. Thank you to the many other people who also were involved in this book.

I'm grateful for the readers who have read along thus far.

Well, I hope we can meet again in the twelfth volume.

KUMANANO — ON A DAY IN JANUARY, 2019



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